Invoking the Studio Art & Design Spirit in Writing Instruction

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Abstract:

This article will address pedagogical and theoretical conversations on the subjects of arts-based pedagogies and similar methods that oppose traditional writing instruction as evidenced in the studio environment. The goal here is to open these spaces to include compositional practices to establish new commonplaces that take students' individual creative and analytical identities into consideration in writing instruction. "The studio" is a commonly invoked metaphor for writing instruction generally, but first-year writing specifically, for the potential of its pedagogies; however, in order to consider how these classrooms might employ (or do employ) some of these processes and practices, I will focus on pedagogical approaches such as constructivism and improvisation that are, in the studio environment, centered on students making artifacts in various media. The purpose of this examination is not only to examine what these disciplines privilege and why, but to find the spaces in our writing instruction that can benefit from a close examination of these beliefs and values.

Keywords: writing instruction, studio pedagogy, first-year writing, arts-based pedagogy

Introduction

The artist's studio has been an area of interest for educators, historians, and art lovers for quite some time. Take for example the MOMA exhibit "A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio" which highlighted the photography studio's various roles as "a haven, a stage, a laboratory, or a playground." A year later at the Gagosian, a gallery was unveiled entitled "In the Studio" which provided a survey on a similar theme. An art studio can be used for a variety of purposes or goals, but it is generally a space where artists work. In higher education, studio art classes are a shared creative community workspace where students have the opportunity to not only work beside each other, but also, to work with one another in a space that can also be considered "a haven, a stage, a laboratory, or a playground." However, despite the possibilities latent in the postsecondary studio environment, as scholar Stacey McKenna Salazar has claimed, the postsecondary studio environment "remains under-researched and under-theorized" (2014, 33).

These are especially interesting ideas for theorists of writing studies, a field which Geoffrey Sirc claims "really lacks . . . a truly broad definition of artistry" (2002, 117). This article will address the commonplaces typically associated with writing instruction in the humanities, and more specifically first-year writing, which I argue shares a similar spirit of experimentation and pluralism as undergraduate art and design studios. My focus is to examine measures that draw on progressive

pedagogies to destabilize the expectations that derive from first-year writing classrooms (and that can be applied more generally in writing instruction) by engaging in pedagogical and theoretical conversations on the subjects of arts-based pedagogies and similar methods that oppose traditional writing instruction. The goal here is to open these spaces to include compositional practices to establish new commonplaces that take students' individual creative and analytical identities into consideration.

"The studio" is a commonly invoked metaphor in writing studies for the potential of its pedagogies; however, in order to consider how writing-intensive classrooms might employ (or do employ) some of these processes and practices, I will focus on pedagogical approaches such as constructivism and improvisation that are, in the studio environment, centered on students making artifacts in various media. The purpose of this examination is not only to examine what these disciplines privilege and why, but to find the spaces in our writing instruction that can benefit from a close examination of these beliefs and values. Again, in higher education, studio art classes are a shared creative community workspace embodying students working individually on their own projects while receiving feedback on their work; the instructor enacts the role of *facilitator*, not imparter of knowledge. The crux of this particular argument is the pedagogical spirit one finds in the art studio and how that spirit can be replicated in first-year writing and writing instruction more generally: the theories, values, and student dispositions that develop in these spaces. The studio art workshop has a unique nature, and it can offer ideas that can be transferred to the writing classroom—even though, as I discuss later, writing classrooms are bare empty rooms whereas studio art spaces tend to have materials (i.e. tools, sinks, big tables or easels, kilns, etc) for students to work their magic. I believe if we examine studio-based pedagogies closely, we may be able to expand the space for variety in teaching and learning methods that encompasses the encouragement of exploration in materials, media, and forms to move multimodality from theory into practice.

Cognitive constructivism and arts education

Constructivist pedagogies and practices connect easily with art education that values choice and student agency. Although there are a range of perspectives and practices associated with constructivism—approximately 18 different variations, according to Kaya Yilmaz, a professor of social sciences—constructivist perspectives share a common assumption that knowledge is constructed in each individual mind. Along the vein of cognitive constructivism, individual learners construct meaning around experiences, and this knowledge becomes formal knowledge when shared and agreed upon. Building deep understandings in subject matters of interest and habits of mind (Yilmaz 2008) are central to learning which is seen predominantly in the studio classroom. Although theories of constructivism may vary in applied method, they share a common belief that learning situations should "connect new information to the student's base of experience" (Simspon 1996, 54) in as many ways as possible. Research within a cognitive constructivist frame seeks to understand the way meaning is constructed from a student perspective through a series of experiences. The origins of constructivism can be credited to educational theorist and psychologist Jean Piaget, who believed that

children build knowledge through play and other experiences, psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his understanding that learning is a social activity, and philosopher John Dewey and his belief that students learn best when they are engaged in tasks that reflect their own interests and experiences.

Unlike other educational theories such as objectivism, which posits that truth and meaning are absolute and inherent in objects, constructivism theorizes that knowledge exists within our minds. So, knowledge is not passively received from the world but actively created through experience. Learning is viewed as an active, adaptive activity (Yilmaz 2008). This activity is adaptive because as individuals engage in new experiences, they must reflect upon those experiences and connect the pieces between old and new knowledge. Constructivism in arts education highlights how learners create knowledge from their own observations and interactions. Constructivist pedagogy is one that makes the student and her experiences central to classroom learning. Art classrooms offer students opportunities to link ideas and to get actively involved in not only the process of discovery, but also in the interpretation of new information (Simspon 1996). The art classroom is a space to link meaning in art to students' own worlds as well as their other academic subjects. This shows a sense of respect for the student's experiences but also helps the student transfer ideas from one context to another. Through this perspective, students become involved in their education and learn to see (or resee) connections between different areas of their lives. A constructivist curriculum is ideally student-centered, advocating for active participation and exploration among students. In the art classroom, this may help students to not only respond to art from a place of emotion but to understand art as a "deliberate result of the desire to express or communicate an idea" (Simspon 1996, 55). Some basic assumptions that arise from these realms of thought include: learning is an active, adaptive process; learning is a situated activity; all knowledge is personal; experience and prior knowledge, as well as social interaction, play a role in learning. Teaching then requires one to:

> Recognize and respect students' backgrounds, beliefs, assumptions, and prior knowledge; provide abundant opportunities for group dialogue aimed at fostering shared understanding of the topic under study; establish a learning environment that encourages students to examine, change, and even challenge their existing beliefs and understandings . . . and introduce the formal domain of knowledge or subject matter into the conversation through a sort of loosely structured instruction. (Yilmaz 2008, 170)

The classroom is centered around the students and their experiences as well as their shared construction of knowledge, while also a balance or negotiation for the instructor between crafting and improvising in the classroom. Content is important in the constructivist classroom, but instead of instructors delivering the information, students are discovering and reflecting upon it through their own work. Through their process of discovery, students are developing multiple processes such as inquiry, analysis, and critical thinking.

Undergraduate art classes introduce students to an array of directions for them to explore. While certain schools require students to choose a specific discipline within art and design, other schools encourage students to step outside their usual medium and explore new options or media

within the studio space. Basic skills are taught in some programs in mediums such as studio drawing, studio sculpting and studio photography, but these classes may be more general in nature to inspire students, give them a firm foundation, or teach them refinement techniques. College art studios are often social spaces inhabited by clusters of diverse works, showcasing the diversity of artistic endeavors. Studio-based pedagogies are not easily quantified when we consider the different elements of and approaches to studio-based teaching. Studio art practices may operate according to conventions or traditions, as a system of communication, or through a system of critical reflection depending on the program or instructor's goals for the course.

The studio classroom norms, or what is endorsed (or rejected) as conventions and behaviors within the classroom environment maintain a level of the following, according to Elliot Eisner:

> Looking at fellow students' work is not only permitted, but encouraged; it's a way to learn. Furthermore, student work is not only looked at, but discussed by both students and teachers. In this setting classroom norms encourage cooperation, autonomy, and community—students can look at the work of their peers and at the same time become increasingly independent . . . if students need something, they are expected to get it . . . It is expected that students will come to the classroom to work, that they will have the materials they need to work with, that they will initiate their work as they enter the classroom. (2002, 73-4)

Eisner highlights the aspects of the studio environment where students are given the freedom to explore, work alongside one another, and engage in dialogue, critique, and collaboration. Although students may engage in collaborative projects or discussions, they still become "increasingly independent" because they are given the tools to think creatively and critically in an autonomous environment where they are stakeholders in their own learning. The pedagogy of the studio is evidence through focus on the conditions of the studio, which are conducive to freedom to learn in a relatively low risk, open setting that fosters learning, making, and experimentation amongst individual learners. Art education naturally takes these concerns into consideration by fostering a tolerance for ambiguity, a process approach to complicated projects, an eye for aesthetics, and allowing for the creation of personally meaningful work.

Students are capable of doing more than consuming the knowledge given to them by their instructors; seeing students as producers can give them agency in their learning experiences and allow them to work through their own processes. The teacher acts as a mentor rather than as a lecturer by sharing their knowledge and guiding the class in their exploration. The facilitators may display and discuss their own processes, share other forms of doing, and inculcate students into the vocabulary and culture of the studio allowing students to take control of their learning experiences and create their own forms of knowledge with involvement where necessary (Cennamo and Brandt 2012). This is not the same as minimally guided discovery as the instructor mentors students and offers extensive instructional guidance, but at the right moments when it is needed. Constructivist pedagogy prioritizes experiences over products; the issue of choice remains central to constructivist pedagogy.

According to Rosanne Somerson, president of the Rhode Island School of Design, the student's initial studio experience is a foundational place for him or her to become introduced to the professional life of an artist. Somerson writes of the student's first encounter:

> The first-year experience for freshmen . . . is about learning how to reset expectations, to find new ways to begin, and to develop the conceptual and making tools necessary to create works that are significant in composition, presentation, function, or solution. The first-year is about devising individual systems for making and breaking one's own rules . . . it is also about learning to live comfortably in uncertainty so as to take new risks and forge new directions, and to push harder through personal limitations than ever imagined. These fundamental and formative experiences contribute to building the experience and bodies of knowledge that shape an artist or designer. (2013, 22)

These indispensable experiences may help the students create "bodies of knowledge" for their future careers but with a level of independence and exploration in their initial practice. According to Somerson, the groundwork set by the first-year experience allows students to uncondition themselves out of their previously held notions of creating to explore new methods and reimagine their process, play with different materials, and create quality work. The scholars who advertently or inadvertently allude to constructivist pedagogies in their classroom practice discuss the combination of autonomy, collaboration, ambiguity, and loose structure within the studio classroom.

Collaboration through dialogue and critique

Tom Anderson, a professor and former chair of art education, argues in his article "Toward a Socially Defined Studio Curriculum" that schools should implement a socially defined studio curriculum to showcase learning as an action, allow students to start the making of art from a place of personal interest, help students become familiar with the ambiguous nature of "question-asking rather than an information-imparting process," develop a sense of the human condition to help them expand and test their own perspectives and experiences, and lastly to help students connect to the society they live in (1985, 16). According to Anderson, these philosophical bases impart a balance between the social and the personal. Again, this is not necessarily a hands-off model but rather a curriculum developed through a sense of both personal insights and connection to society. Anderson puts it succinctly when he claims:

> The central concept of the studio curriculum is that personal perceptions, experiences, and propensities are the causal phenomena that support making, perceiving, and appreciating art. The key to student motivation, then, is to foster an experiential, personally meaningful element within each studio problem confronted. (1985, 17)

Anderson places himself in an interesting position between the social and the personal, the self-interested and the critical. If the self is social, then Anderson seems to think that what occurs in the

studio should reflect students' real life situations; however, "the process of getting from mere impulse to the aesthetic manifestation of that impulse requires active perceptual, conceptual, technical, and design-oriented problem solving," explains Anderson (1985, 17). Through this struggle, students will discover if their selected problems are truly meaningful or only "peripherally related" to their real lives (1985, 17). Through an exploration of their own interests, they will learn the connections between content, style, and media as well as technical skills when navigating those media and selecting the medium of expression. As Anderson continues, the teacher does serve as the "technical facilitator" by providing students with guidance on a variety of topics, but the teacher is also the questioner: "questioning motivations, concepts, techniques, expressive needs, drawing from the student the most that student has to give" (1985, 17). His emphasis on creative interaction between the student and her work as stimulated by the teacher reflects the social nature of the studio classroom in the upper levels of arts education. Anderson argues that instead of teaching students techniques and having them apply those techniques to a predetermined problem, students are developing their techniques in relation to their own interests. To avoid the sort of "chaos" instructors may feel in relation to the constructivist classroom, Anderson explains realistic limitations should be set in terms of "space, time, and materials" (1985, 17). He concludes, "If values are socially-defined, then that should also be reflected in a socially defined art curriculum" (1985, 18).

As one art instructor explained, "What I noticed during my first year of teaching art was that my students seemed highly dependent upon me for ideas. I asked myself how I could facilitate artistic behavior and create a classroom experience that closely resembles that of a community arts studio" (Leysath 2015, 144). This, in a sense, seems like a balancing act that may haunt many classroom instructors: how do we balance expert instruction with student independence? Individuals harness their enormous potential for creativity through both solitary and collaborative production. In the studio environment, because students may be self-directed for much of the time, it is important for students to engage in group discussion, critique, and other forms of collaboration with their peers rather than relying on the instructor's guidance as the sole mechanism for their work. Collaborations occur when students actively work together. This is done during the process of individual production through discussion and critique, but it can also be done through group experiences. Collaboration in its various forms in the studio environment is an advantageous endeavor for both artists and student artists. Collaboration can fuel creativity and exploration because when artists work together, they can support and strengthen each other's work by offering fresh perspectives and inspiration.

Artmaking can be a solitary experience, but ideally, group discussions and critiques can help students practice critical thinking developed out of making and defending choices or suggestions. The incorporation of studio-based pedagogies in the classroom can engage with students' openness to critique, asking them to work with and against suggestions, broadening their choices and defending them in a social environment. Ian Heywood, artist and art educator, similarly claims that an important takeaway from a studio education is "taking responsibility for one's activity, exercising judgement and, as far as possible, being prepared to explain and defend one's reasoning and actions"

(2009, 197). Although the student is setting forth in her own direction, and there is a sense of freedom in that, there are also choices for which she needs to be responsible for explaining and defending. Brian O'Doherty, an Irish art critic, writer, artist, and academic writes of the importance of the studio visitor, "The studio visitor is the preface to the public gaze" (2007, 37). Those who exchange ideas about a piece within the studio help reconsider and reconstruct the artwork before it reaches a more public venue of consumption.

In a design studio, the teacher will pose a problem and the student will work to find their own answers with the teacher acting as a coach or mentor through the design process. The teacher may encourage students to learn by doing, ask questions, and try methods that don't work, all activities which require the students' full participation. Then, students reflect on their learning process and discuss their work with other students (Eigbeonan 2013, 7). Collaboration unfolds in a number of interesting and productive ways in the design studio and is central component of constructivist theories. However, the design studio advocates for both individual and team work (Eigbeonan 2013, 8). Based on the studio design classes they observed, Katherine Cennamo, chair of the Faculty of Learning Sciences and Technologies and Carol Brandt, professor of educational thought and sociocultural studies claim of the design studio:

> Students and faculty practiced . . . intentional participation, design knowledge was conveyed through modeling and meta-discussions, and focused assignments and in-progress critiques enhanced opportunities for the individual and group processes through which design knowledge was co-constructed. (2012, 839)

By participating 'intentionally' with both the assignments given and the critiques discussed, students listen and respond to their instructor or peers with meaningful feedback to create a sense of community and foster open dialogue. In turn, these elements create a culture that forms a definition of artistic knowledge in the classroom. Even though students may be self-directed, it is equally important to have professional guidance, as outlined by constructivist theorists. Cennamo and Brandt also found that engaging in critique with peers allowed for "students' reflection on and discovery of their developing design knowledge through project reviews and student questioning" (2012, 842). In the design studio, projects are followed up by time for both public presentations of work and active reflection on one's own work.

Dialogue, specifically as advanced through critique, improved students' ability to "explain process . . . prioritize information . . . use design language . . . and listen" (Cennamo and Brandt 2012, 843). This allows students to think in complex and reflective ways with the help of their peers and instructors. Cennamo and Brandt argue, ultimately, "Project critiques were most valuable when students presented their work as in-progress, narrating their thinking, rather than demonstrating their final products" (2012, 852). Therefore, when students see themselves as novice learners in the process stages of their work, they are more open to objective, constructive criticism of their work. In his chapter titled "Research Group in Interdisciplinary Improvisation - Goals, Perspectives, and

Practice," James Andean, professor of sound art, discusses his experience working with The Research Group in Interdisciplinary Improvisation as they explored improvisation in cross-disciplinary practices. He explains about the importance of recognizing oneself as a novice: "While one is certainly more competent, and importantly, more confident, in one's own practice, there is also the risk of falling into established routines, habits picked up over the years, embodied patterns" (Andean 2014, 178). By viewing oneself as a novice, an individual is more likely to learn new routines, habits, or patterns. Thiessen explains of her own experience with critique:

> The educational critique is optimized to provide a critical environment and platform for students to present and test their design arguments/propositions … this implies dialogues (and vocabularies) must be based around serious consideration of the work in relation to the audience, context of use and intent, and that formal and aesthetic features of the work are responses to how these criteria are defined. (2014, 149)

Student engagement in critique may add to the social, collaborative studio culture because students gain a common vocabulary and demeanor for analyzing, discussing, and critiquing projects that set them up for the studio environment outside of the classroom. The value of design education is that it is not only interdisciplinary within a confined system of education, but according to scholars such as Thiessen, it also transferable and necessary to approaching everyday existence because it asks us to engage with ideas about who we are and our responsibilities to others. Through creating and receiving criticism, students can learn to see themselves as developing artists and apply these strategies and skills to other areas of their lives, as will be discussed further.

Development of studio "virtues" and assessment

What kinds of dispositions or values develop as a result of the studio experience, and how are these values or dispositions assessed? Elliot Eisner argues that there is more to the arts than learning concrete ways of creating; learning in and through the arts can help the development of a student's mind. Arts education assists cognitive development, informs thinking, "fosters flexibility, promotes a tolerance for ambiguity, encourages risktaking, and depends upon the exercise of judgement outside the sphere of rules" (Eisner 2012, 35). The arts seem to encourage an assortment of beneficial qualities and skills in students, building a culture through shared values and community practices. According to Rosanne Somerson, successful art and design students are imaginative, flexible thinkers with the ability to create in a variety of forms. Somerson explains of her own goals for design students:

> We are committed to fostering creative and critical thinkers who innovate with ease, who are not rattled by uncertainty, who move agilely from one form of output to another, and who can communicate in multiple ways with acuity and clarity. (2013, 20)

In design-oriented curricula, there is often an expectation that students are problem solvers, almost like creative engineers, even with their own creative practice. For example, sometimes the emphasis

is on the student learning *more* about her creative practice and taking risks with that practice. Design studio environments may emphasize content, methods, and self-directed learning skills through collaborative problem solving, reflection, and inquiry. Rim Razzouk, an instructional designer, and Valerie Shute, a professor of educational psychology and learning systems, also discuss the goals of arts education; namely, the authors claim that by improving students' design thinking skills, they will be more ready to become artists and designers themselves. Razzouk and Shute believe when students engage in similar processes and methods as designers, students "will be more ready to face problems, think outside the box, and come up with innovative solutions" (2012, 343). The hope here is that when students engage in these similar processes and methods, they may begin to think and problem-solve like professional designers and move from the position of novice closer to expert.

When Razzouk and Shute discuss the transition from novice to expert they claim, "The major difference between experts and novices is that experts have accumulated a large number of examples of problems and solutions in a specific domain of interest" (338). Therefore, the acquisition of experience, over time, transforms students from novice to expert artists and designers. Razzouk and Shute turn to the disposition of creative thinkers to expand their point:

> Creative people tend to work in two different ways: either as finders or as makers. Finders demonstrate their creativity through discovery. They are driven to understand and to find explanations for phenomena not well understood. Makers are equally creative, but they are driven to synthesize what they know in new constructions, arrangements, patterns, compositions, and concepts. (333)

Students can operate anywhere on this spectrum, and they may shift their place on the spectrum depending on the context. These dispositions are beneficial as a framework as students learn to work with the materials they have and expand the limits of their boundaries. Salazar also examines the disposition of creative thinkers, the condition of the development of artistic disposition, and the way visual culture and contemporary art enhance creativity and cognition. According to her findings, the disposition of creative thinkers includes: "Taking risks, being passionate, having self-discipline, being open and flexible, and understanding multiple points of view," but in order to create these artistic dispositions, students should be allowed to engage in exploration, play, and dialogue (Salazar 2013, 66). Operating between and within the material details and the series of systems available for a creative work embodies the necessity of exploration, flexibility, attention to context, and dialogue. The goal is not necessarily originality but creativity. According to Andrew Eigbeonan, lecturer in architecture, "Originality is inventing out of nothing, while creativity is putting together pre-existing things to make order," and there is "rarely a pure spark in the dark," so most design ideas are "built on existing ideas and formal precedents" (2013, 10).

In another article by Stacey McKenna Salazar, she discusses the surprising lack of research in college studio art culture and art practice. She created a survey for 90 first-year art students which included experiences in foundational studio courses, how studio teachers appropriated class time, descriptions of what students learned, descriptions of teaching, and advice to the next year's

freshman class (2014, 35). Based on the patterns in her survey findings, Salazar compiled five pedagogical ideals for the first-year studio experience. These ideals are not only interesting but immensely useful for this study. The first ideal is "Know Us," where Salazar concludes that students want their teachers to get to know them personally, to "take a personal interest in their individual artistic inclinations and abilities, their lives, and their futures" (2014, 35). The teachers who were most praised by their students were those who took time out of their schedules to chat with students individually, sent students personal recommendations on books or events, and attended off-campus events. Students valued experiences in the studio that exhibited "highly individualized personal interaction" between the instructor and the students (2014, 35). Perhaps when students are recognized for their personal interests they feel like fellow artists and equals. The second ideal is to "Help Us Make Personally Meaningful Artwork" where students praised teachers who taught them to develop their own ideas. Salazar explains that "an effective way to stimulate meaningful student learning is through an inquiry approach that includes strategies of exploration and play or existential questioning" (2014, 36). This has been explored in work on arts-based research as well as in discussions of the values and dispositions of art students. Dialogue and reflective thinking are, clearly, among some of the well-known ways to stimulate learning. The third ideal is to "Teach Us Skills (but not for their own sake)," which balances students wanting to make meaningful work with learning technical artmaking skills. Students expressed that their best instructors helped them develop skills as a way to help them find their "own voice," "gain confidence," or "feel empowered," but who also made connections between skills and bigger ideas (2014, 36). Learning refinement processes for their own sake rather than for furthering meaning seemed to be an area of contention for students, too (2014, 36). Students may want to learn skills in context and as they relate to other ideas they may have. As for the fourth ideal, students want instructors to "Create a Safe Community for Us." Salazar explains, "Students praised their best professors for creating a positive classroom environment by telling stories, facilitating interaction among peers in the classroom, and engaging students in meaningful dialogue" (2014, 36). This would seem especially important in relation to critiques and trying new techniques so that students feel safe and encouraged in a positive environment. The sense of community may help students to take "creative risk(s)" in the classroom (2014, 37). The fifth ideal, "Teach Us How to Live Creative Lives," is where students expressed the life lessons they learned from their first-year studio experience such as "balance life and art," "be a better person," and "live a creative life." Students preference traits rather than skills or concepts in their explanations of the most important thing they learned during their classwork. Three qualities in particular Salazar noted were "risk taking, confidence, and perseverance" (2014, 36). The majority of students said "risk taking" was the most important thing learned during their first year of art school, and they advised future students to take more risks (2014, 36).

Art and design education offers students opportunities for complex problem solving and critical making that transcend structured, preordained forms and methods, but they do offer some structure in other areas. Cennamo and Brandt derived five key guidelines for the classroom from

their analysis of academic studios to help students cultivate particular dispositions or values. The first guideline is to: "Create assignments that require all students to design projects that are similar in terms of goals and context, yet offer opportunities for variation in the products created." In this way, students share similar project goals and context to help them stay organized, focus, and able to work alongside one another; however, there is enough room in these assignments for individuality and personal interest or diversity in form or subject. Cennamo and Brandt also encourage instructors to "provide opportunities for students to learn from each other through listening-in." Listening-in can happen through project critiques, classroom discussions, and presentations of work when individuals are speaking to one another about their work or ideas. Third, Cennamo and Brandt suggest for instructors to "include public critiques to provide opportunities for both students and instructors to model their design thinking." As discussed earlier, time for public critiques is integral to the studio experience, allowing students to participate in discussions of their work, defend their choices, make judgements, and help one another improve their work. Fourth, the authors advise instructors to "conduct meta-discussions about key ideas in response to student work," which echoes Salazar's survey. Finding the overarching patterns in student work and creating conversations about these subjects is immensely helpful for student learning. Cennamo and Brandt close with the notion that instructors should "encourage iteration and provide students with opportunities to have their work reviewed while in-progress," meaning instructors should be reflecting on their goals for their work and having their work discussed not only after it is 'completed,' but also during the process (856).

None of these solutions are extremely specific or straight forward because as many of these authors have mentioned, the diversity of goals, themes, and pedagogies abound in the studio environment, which is part of the beauty of studio pedagogy. What happens in a great many art studio environments is as varied and idiosyncratic as the faculty who teach such courses. There is an assumption that this is the same as minimally guided discovery; however, in the studio, although it is self-guided inquiry, mentors still provide extensive instructional guidance to facilitate student learning. Assignments are focused and scaffolded in a way where students continually discuss the assignment and receive feedback on their work from both peers and mentors. Mini-lessons or benchmark lessons are offered as one means for scaffolding information. In the studio environment, these are usually given on a "just-in-time basis and generally once students experience a need to know the information presented" (Hmelo-Silver et. al. 2006, 100). Teachers play an important role in this respect as they guide students through the learning process, scaffolding information, and therefore decreasing students' "cognitive load" (Hmelo-Silver et. al. 2006, 101). Scaffolding can exist in multiple forms. Cindy Hmelo-Silver, Ravit Duncan, and Clark Chinn, educational psychologists, offer some examples in their work such as "scaffolding that makes disciplinary thinking and methods explicit," "scaffolds that embed expert guidance," "scaffolds that structure complex tasks or reduce cognitive load" to name a few (2006, 101-2). These forms of scaffolding showcase a strongly guided form of instruction.

How writing scholars use studio pedagogies

For about half a century, writing studies has stressed collaboration in the writing classroom via dialogue and exchange; in the last few decades, it has become a truism that the teaching of writing is inherently a 'socially engaged activity,' where writers are never isolated thinkers but always interacting with others, their writing continually shaped by peer/community feedback. Clearly, there is already this very natural and logical pedagogical overlap between the art studio and the writing classroom. So, what studio pedagogies do many writing instructors already invoke in their pedagogy?

In his work, Tom Meyer, Director of the Hudson Valley Writing Project, similarly claims an abundance of discourse in the classroom is an effective way to engage with and understand students' learning style and process (2013). By engaging in dialogue with students inside and outside the classroom and by encouraging their own ways of learning and meaning-making, we may help students find ways to gain confidence in themselves and their thought processes. In the same vein, to assist his students with the writing process, Peter Elbow, Professor of English Emeritus, advocates for the usage of what he calls "unplanned speech" in the classroom. According to Elbow, although speaking and freewriting leads to digression, it also helps lead students to summary and presence in writing assignments. Spoken language helps students to connect better with their audience, promotes more flexible syntax, and has more coherence than written language. Elbow continues, "We can enlist the language activity most people find easiest, speaking, for the language activity most people find hardest, writing" (2012, 139). In this way, his approach parallels studio approaches where students are expected to discuss their projects before, during, and after creation and provide feedback to one another through discussion. According to Elbow, it is through reading out loud that students can "own" or "inhabit their words" and sense how others will experience their words as well (Vernacular 2012, 237-8). This allows students to not only engage in dialogue and critique with others, but also reflectively with themselves. Hearing their thoughts aloud may give them a new perspective of their work while also offering opportunities for their classmates and instructor to participate in the creative process. Another scholar of writing, Mike Rose, an education scholar with a particular interest in writing, advocates for a more personal, invested involved approach from writing instructors in the classroom, but at the same time allowing for organic discussion and movement. For example, he discusses working with students individually on writing assignments to understand not only the student's writing style, but also to understand the student's intentions and composing processes, which is typical in the studio classroom (2006).

As earlier discussed, because students are self-directed throughout most of their time in the studio environment, it is important that they are offered opportunities to deepen skills in media use and discover mediums they may not have used or been acquainted with otherwise during the process stages. This has happened to a heightened degree more recently in writing studies as well Jason Palmeri, a scholar of writing studies with an interest in remix and multimodality, argues about the relationship between the visual and textual, "If we can teach students to understand how they make meaning with visual imagery in their minds, we may be able also to help them develop a more critical

consciousness of how they make meaning on the page" (2012, 39). In this way, the anticipated outcome would be that students can develop a sense of design that marries both text and image based on their contexts and intentions, while the disposition is an openness to forms and an awareness of how form and content work together. According to Jody Shipka, also a scholar of writing studies with an interest in multimodality, communication becomes composition when we attend to the various modes of representation at our disposal. Discussing composition as communication may help instructors focus on the audience, the audience's response, the local context, the intentions of a piece, and the author's reflection on their practices or choices. It is the combination of the parts that lead to the whole Jody Shipka seeks in her writing pedagogy. According to Shipka, giving students access to alternative types of meaning-making strategies opens up their possibilities for communication and successful critical thinking rather than restricts them. Shipka's concern is with the "risk of overlooking the fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice" (2011, 13). In order to address this issue, Shipka offers a pedagogical solution: "An activity-based multimodal framework requires that students spend the semester attending to how language, combined with still other representational systems, mediates communicative practice" (2011, 15). Shipka's pedagogy suggests that student and teacher focus on mediation of writing as they work with different genres and modalities allowing students to maintain an open and flexible demeanor and to construct their own forms of knowledge. Shipka frames her work when she explains:

> In asking students to carefully consider the array of mediational means to which they have access, and to account for the choices they make while combining/recombining these means in purposeful (and sometimes in highly imaginative) ways, the framework supports reflective, rigorous-productive play. (2011, 86)

Shipka reaffirms her belief that students should explore and participate across different forms of media, which is *not* simply a free-for-all experience; it is an experience with real academic merit and difficult decision-making situations. Shipka and Palmeri focus on the mediation of text through various modalities and combinations of those modalities.

These flexible strategies come with a whole assortment of awareness and choices students may not regularly encounter in their classes, but they will certainly encounter in the real world, ensuring they have a flexible disposition and an awareness of the connection between form and purpose. To preserve individuality and identity in writing spaces, instructors can, in the spirit of studio art pedagogy, take more of a facilitator approach to the composing process. The following examples utilize pedagogical approaches associated with constructivism and improvisation in the studio environment. Terry Blackhawk, teacher of poetry, allows her students to enter the assignments independently. She writes of her own role during the process of writing, "As a teacher I try to intrude as little as possible . . . but when they need help I may suggest that they simply describe, reflect upon, or directly address the work" (2002, 7). Blackhawk mentors her students through her assignments without being too invasive, giving instructions or guidance only when she deems

absolutely necessary. Gary Hawkins, a poet, teacher, and artist takes his class on a journey to the museum with a loose plan of what he wants his students to 'see,' but allows for flexible changes to his plan. He reflects on his own role during the process of his assignment:

> I have my plan for what I want to show them, but I also stay attuned to the mood of the tour and to their reactions to what they see . . . I don't set goals for what they should produce in these galleries. Instead, I orchestrate repeating collisions between the students and their expectations of art, the kinds of encounters that will change their ways of seeing even after they leave the place. (2002, 16)

Hawkins' pedagogical approach seems to allow students to construct their own knowledge organically through their experiences with art and he leaves room for spontaneous, improvisational changes to his plans. Hawkins writes honestly, "I am not always successful. All my prodding sometimes only takes a young writer up to the brink . . . and shows him the rewards on the other side. Ultimately, the leap is one that he must make himself" (19). With these sorts of loosely compiled approaches comes an obvious ability to 'miss the mark,' but the benefits greatly outweigh the possible costs according to these instructors. Most importantly, the projects begin as a creative process with no answers, and instead, fascinating things begin to happen through a combination of the students taking risks, exploring options, and finding a personally meaningful way into their work.

Other instructors have taken even more innovative pathways toward writing by having students engage with and produce physical objects in their classrooms. Susan Karwoska, a writer, teacher, and editor asked each student in her class to contribute a piece of fabric to a quilt and a piece of writing to a word-quilt. She writes of her expectations beforehand:

> I hoped that the quilt itself—made of all our scraps—would provide inspiration for the students' writing on memories, and that watching the quilt come together would help them to understand how a finished product—a quilt or a piece of writing—that seems all-of-a-piece is actually made up of many smaller elements. (2002, 43)

Here, Karwoska uses image and word alongside one another to emphasize process. Rosalind Pace and Marcia Simon, writers, artists, and teachers use creative book making as a means to stimulate creativity and confidence. Through a series of visual and verbal activities, the students eventually produce a book of their own. Students are introduced to a brief history of the book form, the alphabet, and printing, each accompanied by a project (e.g. creating prints out of found objects to explore printed image, repetition, space, etc). Pace and Simon explain their pedagogical method for the creative book making project:

> We give simple instructions that allow students to work directly with the materials . . . The two of us each after the fact, as opposed to the conventional practice that begins with the goal (or rationale) followed

by examples . . . Only after work is done do we respond to it. Our responses are always based on finding the uniqueness in each work—not what we think it ought to be, but what is there. (2002, 75)

The authors attempt to measure student work based on a notion of composing to learn like Jason Palmeri rather than focusing solely on quantity or even quality. They allow students to engage with their assignment independently before offering constructive criticism or critique based on their work. Pace and Simon write further, "What we look for in our students' work is evidence that a discovery has been made, that they have gone beyond the expected and the previously known" (2002, 76). In this case, the authors measure what the students have produced and learned, not how the students have produced work according to their requirements or expectations. These approaches are deeply constructivist and improvisational, working with the knowledge students bring to the classroom and allowing them to follow their own line of inquiry.

A challenge for writing instruction: the importance of physical space in studio environments

Art and design educators argue that the layout of the studio classroom facilitates teaching and learning. The physical space of the studio showcases the flexible nature of studio pedagogy. Maarit Mäkelä, professor of design and Teija Löytönen, senior specialist for art and creative practices explain the importance of physical environments: "Physical environments, spaces and relations, then, have affordances to learning processes: they not only create inclusions or exclusions but also open or limit the possibilities for new practices, knowledge(s), networks and relationships to emerge" (2017, 251). Although these can arise spontaneously, they can also be crafted. Cennamo and Brandt found that one of the benefits of the physical space of the studio was that "students are assigned individual desks that are available to them outside of class hours as well as during class" (2012, 840). Assigning students their own space that will be available to them both within and without class time may help students to see themselves as both individuals working towards unique goals and up-and-coming professionals with their own dedicated workspace. Cennamo and Brandt also found that "flexible furniture groupings and technology" foster discussion among students and encourage active learning (2012, 841). Access to the studio outside of class time lead to unplanned interactions, opportunities for collaboration, and availability of resources (2012, 841). The space can promote active learning through furniture that can be rearranged or redesigned, open access, and collaboration because of the teacher-student or student-student interactions and resources available. Outside of the studio model, Christina Bain, a professor of fine arts and editor of an arts journal, Connie Newton, an artist, Deborah Kuster, artist and art educator, and Melody Milbrandt, professor of art and design found through their study that:

> Short class periods presented limitations for both the content to be taught and the way it was presented . . . a small amount of time for children to make art . . . No time was available for looking at art or talking or writing about it. (2010, 240)

The studio class itself uses larger blocks of time for instruction rather than smaller, more frequent amounts of class time. This, the authors agree, builds elements such as a sense of community, self-study skills, and workshop culture. In regard to the studio model, the arrangement, allotted time, and designated workstations are an important part of both the teaching and learning process.

Unfortunately, faculty in the humanities seldom (or never) get the opportunity to work in studios or even choose their own classrooms. Since most writing-based courses do not have access to the structural means of a studio classroom, with all its tools, tables, stations, and materials, we can still learn and take away from arts-based teaching that is informed by the nature and physicality of the physical studio environment by integrating the pedagogy and working with the spaces we do have—moving desks, managing space, relocating when possible—as many of us already do, or we can begin to write more literature on the subject from both the fields of arts education and writing studies on the importance of this physical space, and its effect on pedagogy and learning. The work is still rather limited. The physical space of the studio can still be seen as a useful metaphor for creating a sense of openness and flexibility in our pedagogies that will need further research. For Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson, authors of *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach*, the writing studio is not all that different from an art studio. The writing studio is "a writing program model that provides a highly adaptable approach. It is not limited to a course per se but is a configuration of relationships that can emerge from different contexts" (2008, 7). The writing studio, as proposed by Grego and Thompson, attaches to an existing course as a workshop. In their workshop, "Students bring their work . . . often to present the work and obtain feedback . . . [as] a space for reflective communication" (2008, 8). Students in writing classrooms may benefit from studio pedagogies by raising their awareness of how writing itself is visual and symbolic, showing them how they consistently engage with material objects and the way those material objects appear to audiences, and allowing opportunities for them to experience where they must write for a specific purpose. This concept of a writing studio has infiltrated many universities and changed the paradigms of writing spaces. For some universities like the Fashion Institute of Technology, Duke University, and Vanderbilt University, the writing studio is another term used for the writing center, with more of an emphasis on multiple forms of writing, personal or professional, rather than only academic modes. For other universities, like Colorado State University, it takes the form of an open access site filled with resources for writers. This is an area that requires further research altogether in order to be implemented at the university level.

Conclusions

Constructivist pedagogies share a common assumption that knowledge is constructed around experience. The art classroom, generally, is described as a space to link experiences with work to create meaning. Through the constructivist perspective in the arts, teaching requires one to recognize and respect the student's experiences. This was also further emphasized by Salazar in her survey of the first-year studio experience. Group dialogue is one way constructivism is manifested in

the studio as it is encouraged and fostered through different avenues to create a sense of community and shared knowledge. With this, trust must be developed and interactions modelled and guided by instructors. Trust must occur for both the instructor and the student, as the instructor must trust the students to take responsibility in their learning experiences and the students must trust the instructor to model professional behavior and skills. In constructivist studios, students are responsible for their own learning and their behavior, but instructors act as a guide and mentor through the process of making. The instructor will find opportunities to negotiate between crafting knowledge or improvising, too.

Improvisation is not limited to the study of music. It finds a strong foundation in the arts as well. Improvisation is a balance between technique and spontaneity, meaning it is not necessarily a free-for-fall experience. Even improvisation requires a layering of traditional and refining techniques. This happens for both the instructor and the student in the studio through risk taking and collaborative experiences. Improvisation fits nicely with constructivist pedagogies as they can easily feed one another. Constructivism, as a student-centered, experience-based way of teaching and learning, thrives off of improvisational techniques, dialogue, collaboration, and critique for revision, reflection, and expansion of knowledge. Improvisation also occurs because an artist or designer may take alternate directions during the course of their process that were unplanned but perhaps more natural or client-driven.

Dialogue and critique are absolutely vital to college studios. These forms of collaboration happen in a number of different ways with instructors and students. When students are self-directed, collaborative opportunities like discussion and critique can benefit their practice. From objective observations to judgements, positive environments tend to be more productive because as MaggieAnn Leysath, artist and art educator, and others suggest, building trust in the classroom helps students listen-in and participate. Critique and dialogue, along with arts-based research, can fuel creative practice by adding to or expanding one's ideas. These opportunities also require students to carefully consider their choices, defend them to others, and reflect upon them in different contexts or to different degrees. Discussion also opens the floor to instructor modelling of professional practice, vocabulary, and instances of concrete learning. Critique and dialogue can also encourage students to experiment, ask questions, and try things that do not work in a relatively safe environment (contingent on the instructor and classroom environment). When students recognize themselves as novices in this environment, they can be more open to learning and receiving criticism.

The arts cultivate more than just skills in making; they also help cultivate or refine certain values and dispositions such as being flexible, remaining open to ambiguity, learning to be critical, and engaging in reflection. According to Salazar and others, students desire for their professors to get to know them personally, help them make meaningful but skillful art, help them feel safe to try new things and speak honestly, and learn to be creative in other aspects of their lives. Students also have said that some of the most valuable things they learned in their first-year studio experiences were not skills but traits such as risk taking, confidence, and perseverance. Although a fair amount

of what happens in the studio may be improvisational, there are ways to help students understand the values of the studio environment. For example, as Cennamo and Brandt suggest, assignments can have similar goals but allow for a variety of outcomes, students can learn from listening to one another, students can participate in giving and receiving criticism, and conducting discussions or miniature lessons can help build on knowledge or skills.

Writing studies scholars such as Jody Shipka, Jason Palmeri, and others utilize aspects of improvisational, constructivist, studio-based approaches to the writing classroom. For example, by allowing students to experiment with rhetorical choices and visual means of creation, they are fostering flexibility and critical thinking. The arts are a productive, contemporary pedagogy being increasingly more implemented in the writing classroom. As of recently, there is much interest in the specific value of artistic approaches to visual literacies in writing instruction. As the written and the visual, the handmade and the digital, the alphabetic and the multimedia continue to influence each other, we can expect to see further cross-disciplinary hybridization and curricular mutation manifesting in current disciplines as well as in transdisciplinary contexts. One of the most compelling parts o the comparison between writing courses and studio art courses is that they are both deeply student-centered and bound up in a shared process of creation and critique, with the student's engagement in creation—whether a visual or written construction—serving as the central focus of the course for the student to gain insight or self-knowledge about the way they work individually and with others. Both writing and studio art courses allude to the importance of process in the way students produce work and meaning, and in turn, how they share this work with others, discuss their judgements about work, and reflect upon both. Arts education seems to foster essential skills such as individuality, creativity, risk taking, observation, planning, collaboration, and making in different modalities, as do some contemporary composition scholars. There is an emphasis in studio-influenced environments on reflective thinking, tolerance for ambiguity, trust building, and personal interest.

Artmaking, like writing, can be an isolating experience for some students, but when students converse about their work with others before, during, and after the process of creation, they may be much more engaged, invested, and open to their project taking new shapes and forms. Access to and experimentation with multiple media is an improvisational, studio pedagogy that may help writing students gain the ability to think creatively and critically, both in the work they produce and the work that they study from historical and theoretical perspectives. Some writing scholars limited their students' thinking and communication to on the page in traditional forms. Engagement with traditional forms is necessary, but it not the only means for communication in the 21st century. Exploring modalities may also assist student development as they move from novice to more proficient makers and even in the workplace. The focus is not necessarily on the skills that develop, but the risk taking and exploration, encouragement, collaboration, and personal learning that comes along with learning new materials as seen through studio courses. Art and design education also seems to help students harvest their abilities to be curious and inquisitive observers, critical thinkers, and resourceful self-initiators.

Ultimately, in the humanities, students can follow their own line of inquiry and produce a more creative composition by working with others to create and critique work. Students as active creators can have the freedom to create their own research path, allowing them to develop their own inquiry and project. This style of learning not only helps students adapt to a variety of disciplinary domains, but also ensures a flexible disposition and an openness to self-reflection and critique. Playfulness and risk taking seem to be the central tenants of active questioning and inquiry in art and design classrooms. Spontaneity and intuition are important, but critical thinking and consistent reflection of choices are equally significant and integral to analytical decision-making.

Writing scholars have become increasingly more flexible and artful in their approach to writing instruction. However, there are still a few areas where writing scholars are still not drifting as closely to studio pedagogies as they perhaps could, especially in the first-year writing classroom. In writing studies, one main issue some may face is students' disengagement with writing exercises. When students are given a formulaic, fixed writing prompt, it leaves no room for creativity, no room for identity, and no room for actual critical thinking. Prompts of this variety reinforce the image of the student as simply a regurgitator of information. There is no individual thought involved because students are not the ones generating ideas or knowledge—they simply use the details the instructor has provided. Paul Morris, founding director of a Master of Liberal Studies program and professor of creative writing, literature, and other courses claims that students are disengaged with the "traditional academic essay" (2012, 85) because instructors overemphasize form, which is detrimental to the content students produce. Students can, instead, shift and maneuver between different forms in a writing classroom as they do in a studio classroom. By forms, I mean genres, manners of generating ideas, and manners of composing. Morris writes more specifically on the subject in regard to planning:

> This kind of misguided scaffolding is exemplified in five-paragraph themes that shoehorn ideas into generic structures, denying content and organization in any meaningful relationship. When form becomes formula, planning is stultified, losing much of its generative potential. (2012, 85)

Morris believes that form follows content. If students engage with generic forms, they may produce generic content without creativity or individuality. Students need to engage in their own processes to produce the forms most valuable for their endeavor. Morris writes further:

> Emphasizing planning as a process of problem-solving, it fosters the interplay of idea-generation and organization; it encourages students to mold their form according to their ideas, and to value form as a means of making sense of content. (2012, 85)

However, Morris is not advocating for cursory outlines or oversimplified approaches to planning or prewriting. The form of a project will take shape only after the student has developed his or her ideas and settled on a form in relation to those ideas. Prepackaged formulations suggest that students

should "play it safe" rather than take risks, "And dead plans lead to dead compositions" (Morris 2012, 85). What Morris is implying here is that the design of a piece relies on the content and intentions of the author.

Instead of approaching process as a rigid, linear structure, Morris suggests something similar to the spirit of the studio, "Framing planning as a flexible, ongoing process, the exercise affirms the reciprocity of ideas and structure" (2012, 86). In this way, Morris believes students will focus on their ideas and then give those ideas shape. Jonathan Bush, a professor of English and Leah Zuidema, associate provost and dean for curriculum and instruction explain, "Just as an artist uses skills, rules, and the knowledge of when to break or bend rules for effect, so do writers have the ability to do the same with the text" (2011, 87). Of course, students may have to work within the conventions of their chosen medium or discipline, but there is some flexibility and dynamism to the process of engaging with conventions and fashioning a product. Students, now more than ever, can have the opportunity in their communicative experiences to practice artistry and experimentation in an environment that fosters creative thinking, allows for independence, and offers constructive and improvisational pedagogies. The studio environment invites students to engage with tasks in a relatively low risk but supportive atmosphere where they can both engage with composition on their own but also receive guidance and criticism from peers and faculty.

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