Creative Practice in Higher Education: Decentering Academic Experiences

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This article reports on the preliminary results of a pedagogical experiment instituted by a community of practice (CoP) called the Creativity Collaborative, which is composed of scholars from varying disciplines, backgrounds, and scholarship interests: library and information science, technical education, academic librarianship, media literacy, and rhetoric and composition. In a desire to broaden approaches to teaching and research, the CoP came together around the shared interests of visual methodology and arts-based expression and embarked on a journey to infuse creativity in their professional practice. Through the methodology of self-study, including the CoP acting as a critical friends group, the Creativity Collaborative engaged in individual research activities and then brought data from those projects to the group for discussion and reflection. The results thus far indicate that providing students with opportunities for creativity and arts-based expression lead to a welcome and positive disruption of traditional teaching and learning, increased student engagement, meaning making and real-word connections, and collaborative risk taking that decenters traditional pedagogical systems. Together with students, the Creativity Collaborative discovered the freedom to depart from the normative traditions of higher education pedagogical practices.

Keywords: arts-based expression, creative pedagogy, innovative assessment, peer learning, positive learning outcomes, student engagement

Introduction and context

"Creativity and innovation in education are not just an opportunity, but a necessity" (Ferrari, Cachia, & Punie, 2009, p. 47). Though those words were written more than a decade ago, they hold true today. The visual nature of our global society invites creativity and innovation, and the emotional self craves an outlet to assuage the mental exhaustion and trauma often created by the constant barrage of information and the demands of technology. To that end, we have embarked on a journey to infuse creativity in our professional practice, both pedagogically and through scholarship. What follows is a report on the preliminary results of that journey.

KEY POINTS:

- Incorporating arts-based pedagogy in the classroom invites students to experience alternative ways of knowing and expression and can lead to increased student engagement, collaboration, and deeper meaning making.
- Infusing creativity and arts-based pedagogy in academic settings can positively disrupt traditional notions of teaching and construct inclusive learning environments for students.
- Collaborative risk taking is an effective approach to overturning traditional pedagogical systems in order to center creative approaches to student learning, innovative teaching, and engagement.

Background

As a community of practice (CoP), the authors make up a group called the Creativity Collaborative. Formally created as a reading group with funding from their university's Humanities Council, the group is composed of scholars from varying disciplines, backgrounds, and scholarship interests: library and information science, technical education, academic librarianship, media literacy, and rhetoric and composition. Despite our different backgrounds, two main threads keep us connected: (1) a desire to broaden approaches to teaching and research and (2) a desire to engage in a community of care. Through the first goal, we work collaboratively to examine the ways in which our approaches to teaching and research praxis create inclusive, equitable, and caring learning cultures in higher education. The second goal emerged in an implicit way, but also more naturally, as we began to consider how our visual journaling (which we use both for reflective practice and for self-care) impacted us personally. Through our use of visual journaling in this group, we quickly realized how our bi-weekly sessions, the selection of journal prompts, and mental health check-ins allowed us to be vulnerable with one another, initiate a safe space to just be, and process our experiences working in academia (Redmond, Luetkemeyer, Davis, Hash, & Adams, 2021). In turn, the freedom afforded by participation in these activities within the safety of our community of practice also emboldened us to infuse creativity into our pedagogy.

Arts-based expression as creative pedagogy

Providing opportunities for creativity and arts-based expression "gives students the opportunity to practice synthesizing and expressing information and knowledge using a wide range of communication mediums beyond the tried and true essay" (Hartel, Noone, & Oh, 2017, pp. 182–183). As a way of providing such opportunities, Hartel et al. (2017) encouraged the adoption of what they referred to as "creative deliverables" into pedagogical practice. A creative deliverable is defined as a product that allows students "the freedom to display their understanding of course material in an almost unrestricted range of alternative formats and genres, while retaining some key features of traditional scholarship" (p. 177). Infusing creative expression into pedagogy has the added benefit of encompassing multiple facets of a student's identity, including the affective, which is often overlooked. Attention to the affective is of particular value because "emotions and feelings play an essential role in learning and knowledge creation" (Chemi, Davy, & Lund, 2017 p. 2).

While Hartel et al. (2017) encouraged the use of creative deliverables for library and information science (LIS) education specifically, evidence of the effectiveness of creative expression can be found in the pedagogical literature from other disciplines as well: nursing (Anglin, Halpin-Healy, & Rosenfeld, 2020; Karpavičiūtė and Macijauskienė, 2016; Mitzova-Vladinov & Torrents, 2020; Rieger, Chernomas, McMillan, & Morin, 2020; Rieger, Chernomas, McMillan, Morin, & Demczuk, 2016), economics (de Arriba, Girardi, & Vidagañ, 2019), and education (Grushka & Young, 2014), to name a few. The findings from these studies illustrate that arts-based pedagogy has the potential to influence learning in the following ways:

1. *Arts-based pedagogy encourages community-building and collaboration.* Karpavičiūtė and Macijauskienė (2016) engaged a group of 115 nursing students in silk painting

for three months and found that the practice produced a greater sense of community among students. Collaboration is a key competency for nursing students (as well as other service professions), and visual arts-based training had a positive impact on students' ability to collaborate as well (Mitzova-Vladinov & Torrents, 2020). Thus, creative arts-based pedagogical endeavors have the "potential to support collective and individual identity building and reflection" (Chemi et al., 2017, p. 126).

2. *Arts-based pedagogy elicits meaning making and real-world connections through personalized learning.* Arts-based practice offers a creative alternative for meaning making (Rieger et al., 2016, 2020) and for forming meaningful real-word connections (de Arriba et al., 2019; Grushka & Young, 2014). De Arriba et al. (2019) further found that the ability to make such connections in a way that was personally meaningful increased students' engagement with course material and their interest in learning, echoing Chemi et al. (2017, p. 126): "Artistic activity seems able to both personalise and democratise learning processes, since the visibility of an artwork makes it accessible to negotiation and collective reflection on professional values and concepts, in a way that is emotionally and experientially rooted." This personalization is often missing in the scramble to cover all the material in a given course each semester.
3. *Arts-based pedagogy engages students' affective processes.* The silk-painting experiment mentioned above produced positive emotional and mental effects, as reported by participants (Karpavičiūtė & Macijauskienė, 2016). Anglin et al. (2020) also found that arts-based practice enhances the affective, helping students to develop greater capacity for empathy and compassion, both of which are desirable traits for future nurses. Empathy and compassion are also key competencies for future educators (and other service professions), and self-reflection has become widely acknowledged as a means of exploring one's practice and potentially developing those traits. Grushka and Young (2014) used arts-based self-reflection, which they found to be accommodating of the affective and stimulating to critical inquiry. In short, creativity supports critical thinking and affective function (Chemi et al., 2017).

The arts can be a "safe haven for bold learning experiences" (Chemi et al., 2017, p. 10). However, it is the responsibility of the instructor to ensure that this is the case. Instructors must recognize that background knowledge, lived experience, and a student's current emotional state all factor into how they will engage with creative expression, and space should be created to explore those factors in preparation for the work (Chemi et al., 2017). Explicit instruction and connections between creative activities and desired outcomes are crucial to those activities' success (Rieger et al., 2016, 2020). Arts-based expression can in fact be a negative experience if assignments are not properly scaffolded and parsed. However, though art making is not always a positive experience and the experience is not universal, "both perceiving and making art activate cognitive and emotional processes that are complex, engaging and challenging. At the same time, the challenges offered in artistic experiences can be perceived as safe and meaningful" if the proper attention is given to making them so (Chemi et al., 2017, p. 11). Beyond scaffolding, instructions and expectations should be

clear and students should be assured that it is the process that is important, rather than the production of a perfectly finished work of art. The members of the Creativity Collaborative have found these steps to be useful in their own practice, which is described below. The remainder of this article reports on how they engaged in arts-based expression within their pedagogical and professional practice and what resulted from these creative approaches.

Methodology

Methods

The Creativity Collaborative used the methodology of self-study for this research in order to best attend to the complex intersections across their individual scholarship and collective study. Self-study is "a component of reflection in which teachers are asked to systematically and critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as a way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity" (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 22). Self-study consists of teacher inquiry, action research, and reflective practice (Samaras & Freese, 2006). It is important to note that those who employ self-study methodology engage in reflective practice beyond the boundaries of self and participate in groups of two or more called *critical friends*: "A critical friend acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience" (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 107).

As a critical friends group, the Creativity Collaborative enhances their self-study through ongoing scholarly reading, discussion, and visual journaling. Specifically, the work members do independently to inquire into their own pedagogical activities is shared and extended as we collectively participate in reflective practice during the group's bi-monthly meetings.

Participants

The participants of this study comprise the members of the Creativity Collaborative, as described in the introduction. Jennifer is an assistant professor of library science; Tempestt is an assistant professor of career and technical education; Jewel is an academic librarian, specifically an education librarian in a curriculum materials center; Theresa is an associate professor of media studies; and Peaches is an instructor in rhetoric and composition. Our community of practice represents three units and four separate departments on the campus of Appalachian State University, a large, public university in the southeast, and collectively we span early to mid-career in academia.

Data collection

This study uses two types of data. First, data were collected by the members of the Creativity Collaborative in their individual research projects. Individual research is approved by the Institutional Review Board and unfolds in accordance with ethical research. Collectively, these data comprise student interview data, samples of student work, and reflective memos on teaching or student events. The second type of data is the self-study data collected by the Creativity Collaborative that is broadly focused on the collective research aim, which is to explore what arts-based pedagogy can accomplish for students and instructors. These data comprise our bi-monthly meetings, specifically our special meeting on this particular research aim.

On August 26, 2020, the community of practice gathered for a special meeting that focused on the research aim for this work. As self-study is primarily a reflective practice, we did not start with specific research questions but instead attended to the broad aim mentioned above. Additionally, arts-based educational research calls for an openness to how data may unfold and transform. Knowledge is constructed from the act of artistic inquiry, where researchers "place the inquiry process at the center and value aesthetic understanding, evocation, and provocation" (Leavy, 2017, pp. 9–10). While research questions can guide and, at times, restrict data, more open research aims allow for exploration of all that may arise within a study. The group approached their creative innovations in pedagogical practice with an open mind and a desire to see what results would naturally present from implementation and what insights might emerge from reflective practice and group conversation and journaling. In the August 26 meeting, the members engaged in journaling and discussion related to their broad inquiry. The meeting data include the members' journaling pages, along with the transcription of the meeting.

Data analysis

The first set of data was analyzed by the individual members as part of their research. The second set of data was analyzed using a combination of self-study and thematic analysis. This was then combined with meeting data from August 26 and, collectively, these data were analyzed by Tempestt and coded using thematic analysis. A process of open coding (in the tradition of grounded theory) was employed and data were organized according to "the most significant or frequent initial codes" so as to enable thematic analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46).

Validity and reliability

Using multiple sources of data (student interview data, samples of student work, reflective practice, meeting transcript) facilitates triangulation of the data, which in turn strengthens the construct validity of this work. Reliability was facilitated through careful preservation and coding of the data, followed by participant verification of the final analysis (Creswell, 2014). During coding, pattern matching facilitated internal validity, and care was taken to avoid "subjective judgments during the periods of research design and data collection," to promote external validity (Riege, 2003, p. 80). Rich descriptions of the data have also been included in this paper to further support validity, and participant narratives have been reproduced below (Creswell, 2014). We hope that including the narratives in their entirety will allow readers a glimpse into their practice and the opportunity to replicate the practices that resonate. The critical friends group (as described previously) also served to strengthen validity.

Participant narratives

Peaches: Engagement of students in course content

I began using art-making in my composition courses as a way to engage students. My courses are General Education requirements taken by undergraduate freshmen and sophomores. I tried traditional ways to engage students in writing classrooms such as allowing students to self-select their paper topics and assigning digital reflective portfolios, but my

students were still disconnected from their writing. They searched for ways to complete their papers as quickly as possible without significant revisions. The students' goals were to produce proficient writing that received acceptable scores in the course, while I desired for my students to be engaged in the writing process.

My teaching shifted when I discovered expressive arts, that is, art making that emphasizes the process of art making over a final product that demonstrates artistic skill. Expressive arts allows all individuals to be artists if they put effort into their art making and reflect on the process (Shore, 2009). This method takes a learner-centered (Schiro, 2013), constructivist approach to education, where art can become a way of knowing. Since my students were unmotivated to compose in traditional alphabetic forms, I decided to try a multimodal form of composition that did not privilege academic standard English (Davila, 2016) and invited alternative ways of knowing.

Art making and writing are often paired together in composition courses. But art making is generally used as part of introductory, brainstorming activities for writing (Nolan, 2019; Palmeri, 2012). Even when art making is paired with writing, this practice typically does not extend throughout the course, especially when writing assignments involve research and citations. My goal was to create a course centered around art making that would engage students through multimodal composition (Hash, 2020).

As with many composition courses, my assignments began with narrative and then shifted into an analysis. Many of my students had written rhetorical analyses before and had negative views of this type of writing. They complained to me that their previous teachers expected formulaic, robotic responses to texts they did not care about. Before using art making, this was the assignment that led to many of my students shutting down for the semester. The move from narrative writing, where they could include personal voice, to traditional academic writing in standard English was triggering and oppressive for students. Why did I invite their voices in for one assignment to then tell them not to use them for the rest of the semester? Before including art making, my curriculum was enforcing binaries (Egan & Judson, 2016) of what students believed writing was: informal/enjoyable versus formal/unenjoyable, interesting versus academic, expressive versus standard. But expressive arts caused a disruption of what students assumed a rhetorical analysis was.

Instead of assigning a traditional rhetorical analysis, I asked students to create an artistic response for a text that persuaded them based on aspects of pathos, ethos, and logos. They could use any materials for the art and could respond to any text of their choosing. Immediately after assigning the prompt, students began asking me questions about what they could do. My response was always yes. They had to come to their own ways of knowing. Figure 1 showcases a student's artistic response to the film *Amélie* (Jeunet, 2001).

The second part of the assignment was the writing component. But instead of having them write a traditional rhetorical analysis, I told them to think of it as a tribute that explains how the text persuaded *them*, not just how it was persuasive to a supposed audience. They could write in any form: a letter, a poem, a script, for example, as long as they had the correct in-text references and reference page.

At first, some students were confused. How was this still a rhetorical analysis? But once they brought their projects into class, it was clear that though the assignment disrupted their

Figure 1: Student's artistic response to the film *Amélie*

notions of academic writing, it constructed new, more accurate understandings of rhetoric. Students were able to understand how rhetoric affected them and their peers in authentic, nuanced, complex ways, and they were able to express this knowledge in forms of literacy they were more comfortable in. When the standard alphabetic word was no longer privileged, art making opened up spaces for student engagement and constructed knowledge instead of banked information.

This assignment also influenced my own construction of knowledge. I had been assigning standard writing prompts that were unenjoyable for students to write, as well as for me to read. But expressive arts disrupted my ideas of curriculum, asking me to consider, "What is possible in composition?"

Theresa: Visual journaling as a peer learning strategy

Defined as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" (NAMLE, n.d.), media literacy is a complex field of study. A typical curriculum addresses issues related to media messages, industries, audiences, and effects (Martens, 2010), incorporating topics such as cinema, persuasion, advertising, propaganda, representations, identity, news, data mining, and more. The expansive nature of the field makes developing a comprehensive curriculum challenging. Likewise, a given class may include students from multiple majors—electronic media and broadcasting, advertising, public relations,

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journalism, film studies, English, political science, creative writing, and more. This is the case in my undergraduate media literacy course. While the class is housed in Curriculum and Instruction, students come from departments and colleges across campus, bringing with them various prior knowledge, preconceptions, misconceptions, and opinions. Such uneven beginnings certainly hold abundant potential for cultivating fruitful conversations, yet how does one design curriculum that achieves this vibrant discourse? How does one create learning where students feel invited and supported in sharing their perspectives with peers? In part, this context led me to use visual journaling as a creative pedagogy.

A visual journal is like a sketchbook, art journal, or other notebook where the author uses words and images to process thoughts and ideas. Alongside other instructional strategies—such as deconstructing media clips, Socratic seminar, and group projects—I began using visual journaling to stimulate student inquiry. Students might create a collage on key media literacy concepts or write haikus to share perspectives on media representations. As part of a larger study, I collected data about students' perspectives on visual journaling using end-of-semester interviews, and the initial results surprised me. Here I share one emerging theme from my preliminary thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of spring 2019 interview data. All names are pseudonyms.

I expected mention of the creative nature of visual journaling or comments about how journaling reinforced course ideas, but I did not anticipate students' reference to *peer learning*. Boud (2001) explains that peer learning is abstract and cannot be defined as "a single, undifferentiated educational strategy" but rather "encompasses a broad sweep of activities" (p. 8). He elaborates that peer learning is under-researched and often misunderstood, as faculty mistakenly identify group work as peer learning (p. 12). Despite lacking scholarship, there is consensus that it involves peers in a reciprocal process where "peers are other people in a similar situation to each other who do not have a role in that situation as teacher or expert practitioner" (p. 9). While Boud notes specific strategies, inquiry using a visual journal is not included. Although it is early in my analysis, peer learning surfaced as a focal point of students' experiences with visual journaling.

For example, when discussing a comics journaling prompt, Jay explained, "it was a great exercise in showing that everyone has a different perspective, especially when putting two of the same comics together." Troy elaborated, suggesting that visual journaling helped facilitate sharing when students may not have otherwise opted to do so:

> We got to see everyone's different perspectives on all the topics we talked about. . . . You got to see everyone's opinions. . . . In the end, it helped show people's creative sides as well as what their true opinions might be because they might not have wanted to share in front of the entire class.

As Boud (2001, p. 14) finds, "There is evidence to suggest that fostering critical reflection and reassessment of views more readily comes from interchange between peers than even from well planned discussion sessions with teachers" and that students "are able to . . . be more open to be critiqued by peers, as well as learning from listening to and critiquing others." Figure 2 shows two students journaling about misleading information and fake news.

Figure 2: Students journaling in class

Along with data from students' interviews, my anecdotal observations of selected classes illuminated the power of visual journaling as a peer learning strategy. The sound of my classroom shifted from the gentle hum of decentralized small-group conversations to a concert of noises—crinkling paper, tearing pages, clicking scissors, squeaking pens—and the excited chatter of focused discussions. Kraehe and Brown (2011) explain that arts-based inquiry absorbs learners cognitively, somatically, and emotionally, writing that "the more emotionally engaged one becomes during an aesthetic learning experience, the more potentially memorable, meaningful, and generative are the personal transformations" (p. 492). From my analysis, I'll add that transformations are not only personal but also collaborative. Visual journaling may be a meaningful peer-learning strategy that cultivates students' creative capacities for reflection, metacognition, and sharing.

Jennifer: Visual journaling as innovative assessment

Assessment can be formative (designed to monitor student learning throughout a course) or summative (designed to evaluate student learning at the end of a unit or course) and can be further drilled down to either standardized/objective (either commercially or teacher-prepared) or authentic (real-world and teacher-prepared) assessments. Although authentic assessments often take more time, both to create and to evaluate, their use "has been found to have a positive impact on student learning, solve problems skills, autonomy, motivation, self-regulation and metacognition" (Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, Bruna, & Herrera-Seda, 2018, p. 840). Every assignment in our library science program is a carefully constructed authentic assessment, as the vast majority of our students are either already employed in K–12 (often already in the school library) or will be upon graduation. However, I found in my first two years of teaching in the program that students were sometimes missing crucial connections between the assignments they were completing and some of the topics we covered in class related to the bigger picture of school librarianship. It was not that they

didn't see the value in the work or the class content, but rather that there was some cognitive dissonance occurring. Something was missing.

Not long after I began pondering how to bridge the gap between coursework and the "real world," I had the good fortune to join the Creativity Collaborative and was subsequently introduced to visual journaling. As I learned more about the process (described previously), I became excited about the possibility of using the technique with my students. My only potential roadblock was the fact that all of my courses occur online; therefore, students would not have the benefit of working side by side and learning from each other. I decided to forge ahead regardless, because the opportunity to help students make connections outweighed any potential shortcomings.

The first semester, I employed visual journaling in only one class. For each synchronous class, I created a prompt that was designed to help students make those missing connections. I specifically introduced the topic in a synchronous setting so that students could ask questions and benefit from class discussion. As an example, in my collection development course, students must work with a specific library and their first assignment is to write a community analysis. A little later in the course, we dive into the literature and data on marginalized communities. I wanted them to connect back to their community analysis, so I created the following prompt: "Think about your library's community. What marginalized population(s) might you encounter? Create an image that reflects that/those population(s) and how you will provide equitable services to them." Students could respond to the prompt using any supplies they had on hand or chose to purchase. I then had them scan or take a picture of their response and upload it to a Google doc (shared with me) and follow each image with (1) a caption for the image, (2) a description of the image, and (3) how the image related to their understanding of the course materials. As I reviewed the images from this prompt and compared them to students' community analyses, I saw that most had carefully considered their population and demographics and made appropriate connections in constructing their responses. I found similar results with the other prompts I created for the class.

With this (what I considered to be) success under my belt, I expanded visual journaling to all of my classes the next semester and have not looked back. I have since had students create digital collage and video to respond to prompts in addition to more traditional visual journaling—no creative medium is off limits. Figure 3 features one student's digital collage response to the previously mentioned prompt. Her accompanying text indicated that she has taken steps to help the poor in her community by eliminating overdue fines. These are the types of connections I want students to make as they prepare to serve their communities.

I take the time to talk to students about the process of art making in the tradition of expressive arts (see above) to put them at ease. I share my own visual journaling pages—the good, the bad, and the downright ugly—to show them that it is not about the final product but rather the process. One student expressed internalization of the spirit of expressive art making in a comment in her (separate) text journal entry for the week: "Tonight for our assignment in class we had a visual journaling activity. I am far from an artist, but really enjoyed this assignment."

Figure 3: Student's community analysis digital collage

As a form of what I like to call supplementary authentic assessment, visual journaling has far exceeded my expectations: (1) it gives students the rare opportunity to be creative, (2) it allows them to express themselves visually rather than textually, and (3) I can quickly and easily evaluate whether or not connections have been made and plan remediation if not. Another student also recognized the usefulness of visual journaling as assessment for her own K–12 students: "Some of the things that have excited me most that I have squirreled for later use were some of the inquiry based research models we explored, new assessment tools (especially visual journaling, the question game, and the tech tools [the guest speaker] presented), and new ways of differentiating."

But the most important benefit for me is the pure enjoyment that students experience. Because of the effects of the pandemic on summer 2020 courses and the already quick pace of our five-week courses, I did not include visual journaling, choosing instead to focus on the basic content of the course. A number of students who had gotten used to the visual journaling routine emailed me or spoke up in class to tell me how much they had missed it over the summer. Even if enjoyment was the only benefit of visual journaling for my students, it would be well worth incorporating in a world where creativity is not always encouraged.

Jewel: Encouraging positive learning outcomes through creative care for the whole student

As an education librarian, I work with students in a variety of academic and non-academic library settings. Campus libraries can be third places, welcoming spaces outside of home and work that are flexible and cater to community needs (Lewis, 2017). To help promote the library as a community space for students beyond academic research and study, I created an arts-based self-care and wellness series.

It is important to address the whole student in academic institutions by providing a holistic approach to education and supporting academic and personal development (Schoem, 2017). College-age students are still in an active stage of development and are facing pressure with increasing workloads and the stress of living independently. Along with providing tools to prepare students to critically engage in their academic disciplines, we should consider ways to provide students with tools to support healthy development and wellness.

The arts-based self-care series was created to promote healthy wellness practices focused on creative mindfulness and reflection, positive affirmations, and relaxation. As part of the series, I created a self-care zine to disseminate at each event. The zine (see Figure 4) included self-care definitions and tips, library resources on self-care, and university wellness resources. Zines are used as pedagogical tools in the classroom as a way to highlight and create multimodal and multi-genre writing, to promote and interpret alternative media and to challenge and discuss the hierarchy of authority placed on traditionally published texts and media (Thomas, 2018). I wanted to provide a creative alternative method of delivery of instruction for students to learn about self-care and our university resources. A zine provided a format outside of the traditional media that students engage with in classes (i.e., textbooks, library databases, academic websites, etc.), and in using a zine, I was able to frame the workshops around community building and art-making without having to deliver content in a more formalized way.

One highlight of the self-care series was a self-love art workshop focused around positive affirmation creation. The workshop was free and advertised around campus. Any students who were interested could register to attend. As a way to build community, we began the workshop with a meal and introductions around the room. After the meal, I passed out the self-care zine and led them through a short guided meditation and reflection. We then created art and affirmations. I framed the creation portion of the workshop as an open-ended and unstructured art session. In unstructured art sessions, participants have the ability to create by choosing from a variety of art mediums. Stations with various art materials were placed around the room with sample art and tips for how to use the materials. During the art-making session, I played music and a slideshow of sample positive affirmations.

It was a positive and productive experience. The students freely created art and affirmations and used a variety of the materials. Unprompted, they walked around the room and talked with one another and made art together. They engaged in discussion with one another about their levels of stress and how they were coping, and many expressed excitement about making their own zines and incorporating art sessions into their lives to help them relax. They comfortably engaged with me and asked questions about library and university services and in particular resources for supporting mental health and wellness. The space created in the library during this event was one of both creative learning and community care. Students were comfortable having conversations around their wellness and learning about art-based strategies and campus resources. These types of creations of creative spaces are important to reaching our students beyond the classroom. Learning can occur in any setting around any topic, and creative pedagogy can include moving outside

LOVE YOSEF

SELF-CARE TIPS + RESOURCES

no. 167

self-care;

/self'ker/*noun.*

1. the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress --oxford dictionary

2. deliberate acts taken to care for your mental, emotional, and physical health --psychcentral

RADICAL SELF-CARE

A BOLD UNAPOLOGETIC STATE OF BEING

PRIORITIZING YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF YOU

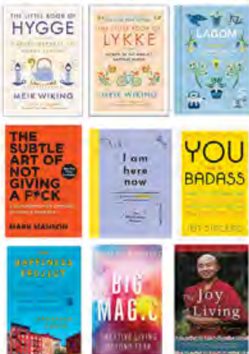
WHAT'S YOUR SELF-CARE DEFINITION?

SELF-CARE TIPS

1. Practice mindfulness by making time to reflect and check in on your mental and physical energy
2. Use positive language and self-talk
3. Set realistic goals and reward yourself for accomplishing them (big and small)
4. Work on saying "NO" and let go of perfection.
5. Cultivate positive relationships and surround yourself with supportive people
6. Schedule relaxation and self-care as part of your weekly activities
7. Eat consciously, but don't be afraid to indulge sometimes
8. Do physical activities that are fun for you
9. Sleep.
10. Engage in fun or creative activities that make you feel good and rejuvenate your spirit

List the activities that bring you joy. Do these often.

BELK LIBRARY RESOURCES



UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Appalachian Cares-appcares.appstate.edu

Wellness & Prevention-wellness.appstate.edu

Student Health-healthservices.appstate.edu

Counseling & Psych-counseling.appstate.edu

Dean of Students-deanofstudents.appstate.edu

MINDFULNESS APPS

Zine Created by
Jewel Davis
Education Librarian
davisjas@appstate.edu
twitter @jewel_davis

Figure 4: Pages of self-care zine

of the classroom to reach students. In this way we can work to create communities of care and learning in a variety of spaces and settings around campus.

Analysis and discussion

The preceding participant narratives, along with the self-study data from the August 26, 2020, meeting were analyzed thematically. Analysis from the data resulted in the following themes: (1) disruption of traditional teaching and learning, (2) increased classroom engagement and real-world connections, and (3) students and teachers taking risks together.

Disruption of traditional teaching and learning

Across the written narratives, the author's visual journals, and the transcription from the meeting, some variation of the word *disrupt* (*disruption*, *disruptive*) was used 16 times. Participants expressed how they observed their students experiencing disruption throughout their learning. More specifically, in referencing an open-ended expressive arts project, Peaches said:

> At first, some students were confused. How was this still a rhetorical analysis? But once they brought their projects into class, it was clear that though the assignment disrupted their notions of academic writing, it constructed new, more accurate understandings of rhetoric.

In addition to this reflection on the disruption that was evident, Peaches expressed how her own perceptions of course curriculum were also disrupted as a result of teaching this course asking two pointed personal reflection questions: *Why did I invite their voices in for one assignment to then tell them not to use them for the rest of the semester?* and *What is possible in composition?*

Jennifer described the group's work during the thematic journaling discussion as disrupting the norms of higher education:

> So, disruption, I felt was the most important. So I have it written in the boldest color. That was easiest to see. And I felt like it was at the center, I felt like everything that we wrote about even though we may not have said it was disruptive . . . this whole thing that we're doing is disruptive, as we said earlier, to what's the norm in higher education.

She continued this in her drawing of a student and their speech bubbles, one of which exclaims "this is not like other classes" and Jennifer explained "which definitely goes with the idea of disruption."

Jewel's disruption is clear in her narrative and comes in the form of space, topic, and material selection. Through her wellness workshop and use of zines, she explains: "These types of creations of creative spaces are important to reaching our students beyond the classroom. Learning can occur in any setting around any topic, and creative pedagogy can include moving outside of the classroom to reach students." It was the using of the library space and the use of zines that challenged the traditional assumptions that the library is solely for academic support and how the transference of knowledge is not limited to the superiority placed on traditionally published texts that are seen as superior.

Collectively, the data position disruption as necessary for innovative teaching, learning, and engagement in higher education. Overturning norms and problematizing the status quo

to find more effective ways to meet the various needs of our students is critical. Whether it's completing more authentic and engaging assessments in library science, learning with and from peers in media studies, participating in alternative ways of knowing in composition, or attending to students' personal development alongside their academic development, traditional pedagogical systems and practices are decentered in favor of more creative approaches.

Increased classroom engagement and real-world connections

Teachers often struggle finding ways to get students to participate and engage deeply in course discussions and materials. From the data, we see how visual journaling as a creative pedagogy increases student engagement and joy. Engagement was augmented as students saw relevance and direct connections to their "real world." A frequency count across the data shows *engage* or *engagement* occurring 20 times.

Theresa described this engagement in an observatory way in her narrative sharing: "The sound of my classroom shifted from the gentle hum of decentralized small-group conversations to a concert of noises—crinkling paper, tearing pages, clicking scissors, squeaking pens—and the excited chatter of focused discussions." Additionally, as shown in Figure 5, her blackout poem from the research meeting embodies her students' voice: "we too, we will, we can be engaged! Give us the opportunity of meaningful ways to connect together; a lost art. Learning makes our heart sing."

Similar to the peer connections students were making and engaging with in Theresa's class, Jewel's use of art in her workshop led to increased student engagement and comfort with her and with their peers:

> Unprompted, they walked around the room and talked with one another and made art together. They also engaged in discussion with one another about their levels of stress and how they were coping, and many expressed excitement about making their own zines and incorporating art sessions into their lives to help them relax. They also comfortably engaged with me and asked questions about library and university services and in particular resources for supporting mental health and wellness.

Jennifer extended our understanding of classroom engagement through connections to inclusion. She wrote about how her students' enjoyment of visual journaling was a major benefit for her, and when describing her visual journal entry she explained, "engagement and inclusion, I felt were themes that were central to everybody's work, no matter what."

When justifying how she came to visual journaling, she explained she needed some new approach because her students were "missing crucial connections between the assignments they were completing and some of the topics we covered in class related to the bigger picture of school librarianship." She was already "pondering how to bridge the gap between coursework and the 'real world,'" and she felt that joining this research group and learning more about visual journaling helped in this area. After implementing it as a strategy in her classroom, she saw students "made appropriate connections in constructing their responses." The ways in which her students engaged with visual journaling was evident as she reflected on how she removed it as a course element for the summer 2020 course, and several students who had gotten used to the routine shared how much they missed it over the summer.

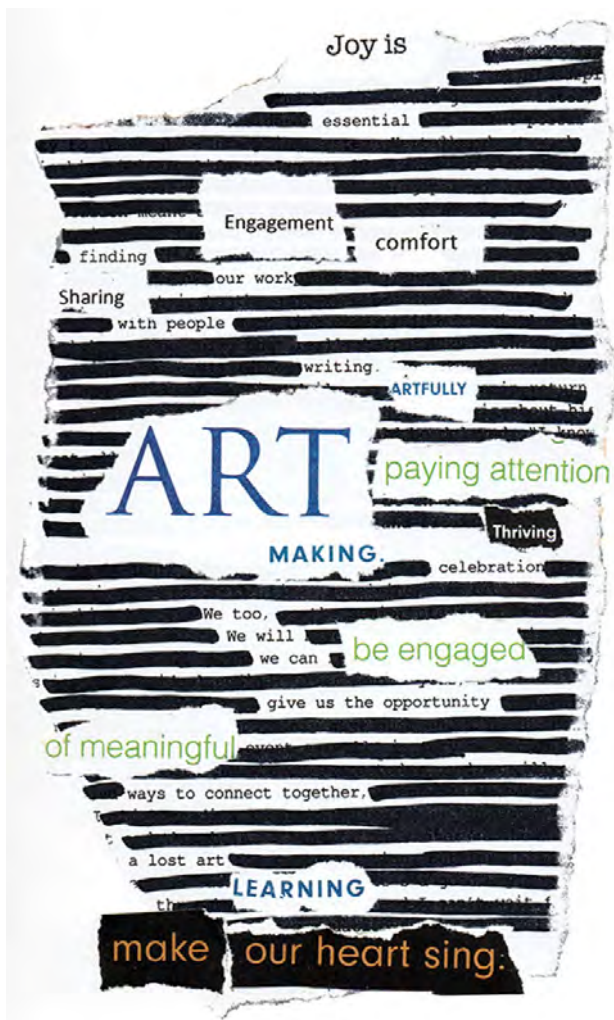


Figure 5: Theresa's research meeting blackout poem

From the data, we see how students are able to make real-world connections and how they are more engaged in their learning activities. The students in library science were able to dive deeper into meeting community needs. Students in the wellness workshop sought out resources for supporting mental health and wellness across campus. The real-world connections and engagement for the composition students led to "more accurate understandings of rhetoric." The media studies students were able to work collaboratively, sharing what they learned in numerous creative ways. They were learning from one another through their personal creativity. Additionally, as the students became more engaged, we saw links

to inclusive teaching. Inclusive teaching creates a learning environment where students feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and where they feel connected to their learning.

Students and teachers taking risks together

From the data, we see evidence of the ways in which the themes of disruption and increasing real-world connections for students involved taking risks. Unlike the previous two themes, where the frequency made it clearly evident, this theme was less explicitly pronounced.

Taking risks is threaded throughout the data but seen clearly in Jennifer's account on two occasions. First, from her narrative she shared, "My only potential roadblock was the fact that all of my courses occur online; therefore, students would not have the benefit of working side by side and learning from each other." Her approach to easing students into the process of art making and visual journaling included "shar[ing] my own visual journaling pages—the good, the bad, and the downright ugly—to show them that it is not about the final product but rather the process."

While Jennifer was navigating the risk of using this new method via online instruction and exposing her own journal entries, Peaches was also navigating the risk of deviating from assigning a traditional rhetorical analysis. More specifically, she left the assignment extremely open ended. She explained: "Immediately after assigning the prompt, students began asking me questions about what they could do. My response was always yes. They had to come to their own ways of knowing." This willingness to take the risk is further evident in her overview of her visual journal entry: "It's like, wait a minute, you just threw something out there and didn't predict what was gonna happen?! You always hope that your students will enjoy it but you never know." Yet, despite the unknown, the possible rewards outweighed the risks, as articulated by Jennifer: "Even if enjoyment was the only benefit of visual journaling for my students, it would be well worth incorporating in a world where creativity is not always encouraged."

While it was initially risky for the teachers, the students likewise had to take risks in this new way of learning. Peaches' students expressed confusion and had to struggle with the unlearning and relearning of what constitutes rhetoric. Jewel's students risked opening up about the stress levels and coping mechanisms. Theresa's students risked learning from their peers in personal ways through their materials which ultimately led to "transformations are not only personal, but also collaborative."

The essence of this theme is most clear in Jewel's reflection of her journal entry: "we can collaborate and learn from each other by viewing what we create by discussing what we create." While visual journaling can be individual and largely private, this research group is able to process their thoughts and ideas about teaching and learning in ways that have ignited innovative and creative pedagogy through collaboration. But doing so required us to navigate the unknown, to be willing to try and fail, and to be vulnerable.

Conclusion

Art making, visual journaling, and creative pedagogy offer endless possibilities to enrich students' experiences in higher education—possibilities to challenge traditional teaching norms, to expand approaches to assessment, to broaden learning composition, to enhance

student inquiry, to widen learning spaces, to give permission to explore, and to reinvigorate enjoyment in learning. Through visual journaling and other forms of art making, students were able to make meaning and construct knowledge on their own terms.

The employment of creative deliverables is a disruption of what is considered "normal" academic pedagogy, but, like Hartel et al. (2017), we advocate for doing so and seek to normalize the practice. Our classrooms have become spaces where we invite students to participate in active meaning making; we give them permission to be open to do so, while challenging what we know to be normal or traditional. Arts-based expression "seems able to both personalise and democratise learning processes" and allows students to reclaim their own education in a way that standardized testing and curricula often restrict (Chemi et al., 2017, p. 126). As instructors, we are challenging normative pedagogy, but we also see how our students are challenging what they have become accustomed to in school, whether they know it or not. Through this, we increase awareness of possibility and we boldly and intentionally fight rigid notions of how teachers teach and students learn.

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