

The Arts as a Bridge to Understanding Identity and Diversity

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Abstract

As educators in developmental education, we need to develop imaginative ways to teach students with diverse cultural backgrounds and abilities. This chapter describes an experimental humanities course that used artistic processes and content as a way to teach multicultural issues to students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Readings and discussions, visiting artists, examples of art, and their own artmaking enabled students to use artistic perspectives to reflect on issues of diversity and to translate their own thoughts and feelings into symbolic form using images, movement, or words. We discuss conditions that promote critical and creative thinking and active participation.

During finals week 75 students and three instructors gathered to see the visual and performing art that students had created during a ten-week, team-taught arts and humanities course, “Identity, Community & Culture: Connections in the Arts and Humanities.” There was a strong feeling of individual and collaborative accomplishment as we watched dances choreographed by students who previously thought they could not dance, looked at art work made by students who had assumed they could not draw a stick figure, and heard stories told by students who had believed they would never be able to get up and speak to

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a large group of people. Most of all, there was a sense of joy and discovery from seeing so many different expressions of students' worlds, including photomontages of family ancestors, oil pastel drawings of symbolic images of home, dances about emotional, figurative, or literal journeys, and stories about growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. Students' art work gave shape to their individuality, their commonality, and their diversity as they taught each other about the power of the arts to create bridges among people.

These presentations were the culmination of an experimental, interdisciplinary course offered in General College, a two-year non-degree granting unit within the University of Minnesota. The mission of the College is to help underprepared and non-traditional age students develop their academic potential and transfer into degree programs. The curriculum is structured around content-based liberal arts courses, including the arts. Teaching through and about the arts invites students into cognitive, affective, social, and sensory learning experiences that develop their intelligence in multiple ways (Goldberg, 1996; Greene, 1995). In accordance with the college's mission of meeting diverse learning needs and providing multicultural perspectives in a developmental environment, our course provided students the opportunity to explore issues of diversity through critical and creative modes of learning. Students wrote, read, and held discussions about topics such as heritage, language and social power, and sexual identity. They listened to visiting artists, viewed art that addressed similar topics to the readings, and engaged in creativity exercises and their own art making. These combined activities enabled students to use artistic perspectives to reflect on issues of diversity and to put their own thoughts and feelings into symbolic form using images, movement, or words.

We had five goals for students in this course: (a) to deepen awareness of their own identities in relationship to their own and other cultures; (b) to become sensitized to the values, experiences, and artistic expression of diverse peoples; (c) to become attuned to the ways that the arts express the complexity of contemporary life; (d) to learn to use artistic languages to understand and express ideas, feelings, and experiences; and (e) to practice working with ideas and processes that are open-ended, complex, and ambiguous.

In this chapter, we discuss ways we used the arts as a conceptual, creative, and affective bridge to successfully engage students of different abilities with ideas about diverse identities and communities. Students used art to examine these issues in three ways: they actively viewed a variety of art forms, participated in presentations by visiting artists, and created their own art. Viewing art by artists who explore identity, heritage, and contemporary society helped students think about and articulate these issues, and making art themselves demanded that students identify their own values and create their own imaginative images, movements, and narratives. By engaging as both artist and audience, students expanded their perceptions of what constitutes identity and community, and they practiced both interpreting symbols and creating them.

We believe that students' beliefs and experiences shape their learning, so we designed instruction to utilize students' personal and cultural knowledge as an explicit part of the course content. Our focus on students' knowledge was a reflection of a "learning paradigm" rather than a "teaching paradigm" (Barr & Tagg, 1995), and it reflected a constructivist approach to learning

in which students, in interaction with others, construct models of reality that guide their actions and the way they make sense of their experiences and form meaningful conceptual structures (Candy, 1991). By incorporating student discourse, we sought to maintain a dialogue in the classroom that would increase students' connection to course material and show them how their lives might be viewed in terms of the critical and creative concepts being studied (Shor, 1992).

We used diverse instructional strategies to address differences in learners. Dimensions of learning include the way an individual adapts and assimilates information; intellectual processes used to make sense of information; preferences for various learning environments, instructional methods, and subjects; and culturally-shaped values and preferences for certain approaches to learning (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Bonham & Boylan, 1993). Personality, past and current life situations, personal interests, and motivation also are factors in learning.

Our course was an experiment in active ways to use the arts to teach diversity to academically underprepared students. We describe below the underlying rationale and structure of the course, characteristics of the participants, and our instructional methods. We also identify conditions that shape a supportive, creative learning environment, ways that students made connections among concepts and activities, and implications of this kind of course for developmental education.

Identity, Community, and the Arts

The theme of the course, identity and community, met the needs of underprepared students as they seek to establish their sense of self in relationship to their own and other cultures. College students wrestle with significant issues of identity as they construct a new understanding of themselves in relation to school, family, and peer relationships. Identity can be thought of as “a dynamic fitting together of parts of the personality with the realities of the social world so that a person has a sense of both internal coherence and meaningful relatedness to the world” (Josselson, 1987, pp. 12-13). Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest that the development of identity includes comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, and a sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context. Establishment of identity is a life-long process that is particularly crucial during the college years, especially if the student is a late adolescent, although students of nontraditional age also experience identity issues as they find their places in the new world of higher education and begin to integrate their academic experiences into the rest of their lives.

Besides exploring personal identity, it is important that college students expand their understanding of cultural diversity so that they will be able to constructively participate in our increasingly diverse society and become more aware, tolerant, and sensitive to the traditions, beliefs, and realities of their own and of others' communities. Although students exist within one or more cultures in which there are implicit, usually unspoken norms, they often are not aware of these norms until they interact directly with someone from a culture with different norms. Students may have difficulty or even resistance to learning about other cultural perspectives, especially if they engage in dualistic thinking, form premature judgments, have difficulty

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dealing with ambiguity, or show intolerance toward people and ideas that are unfamiliar to them (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; King & Kirchner, 1994). In addition, cultural insularity influenced by students' family, high school, and community experiences and by stereotypes promoted by mass media often results in patterns of xenophobia, homophobia, and racism that make learning problematic.

As a response to the often alienating and divisive pressures of contemporary society, educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) charges educators with the task of empowering students to be critically aware of their own realities:

...we teachers must so emphasize the importance of persons becoming reflective enough to think about their own thinking and become conscious of their own consciousness. People must become aware of the ways they construct their realities as they live together—how they grasp the appearance of things, how and when they interrogate their lived worlds, how they acknowledge the multiple perspectives that exist for making sense of the common sense world (p. 65).

The arts provide a unique process for reflection and critique because they touch us aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually, and kinesthetically. The visual arts, music, dance, drama, or literature each have different techniques, vocabulary, and conventions through which ideas are expressed, but metaphor is an essential concept that underlies all of these arts. Rooted in the concrete and sensory, metaphors present information in ways that link personal, transpersonal, cultural, and disciplinary knowledge (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sanders & Sanders, 1984). Poet and essayist Kathleen Norris (1996) writes about the way that metaphors touch us:

Metaphor is valuable to us precisely because it is not vapid, not a blank word such as "reality" that has no grounding in the five senses. Metaphor draws on images from the natural world, from our senses, and from the world of human social structures, and yokes them to psychological and spiritual realities in such a way that we're often left gasping; we have no way to fully explain a metaphor's power, it simply is (p. 156).

The aesthetic, emotional, kinesthetic, and symbolic aspects of metaphors convey complex dimensions of meaning and provide links among students' personal experiences, their cultural knowledge, and the course content. To grasp the nature of metaphors and to know how to interpret and construct them is to understand concepts at a deeper, more insightful level than mere facts. Although the complex nature of metaphor often seems difficult to describe, the process of interpreting and constructing metaphors is teachable.

To emphasize the way that metaphor illuminates and creates personal, cultural, and cross-cultural meanings, we structured the course around metaphors of trees, circles, journeys, barriers, home, and bridges. Metaphors add dimensions of meaning to these ordinary objects in ways that are life-affirming and, in many cases, cross-cultural. Trees, for example, symbolize life, flexibility, growth, and family. Circles symbolize life, birth, community, journeys, and completion. Perhaps the most significant metaphor in the course was "bridges," for students needed to perceive that within the complexity of the course were multiple relationships and connections among art forms, social issues, and their own lives.

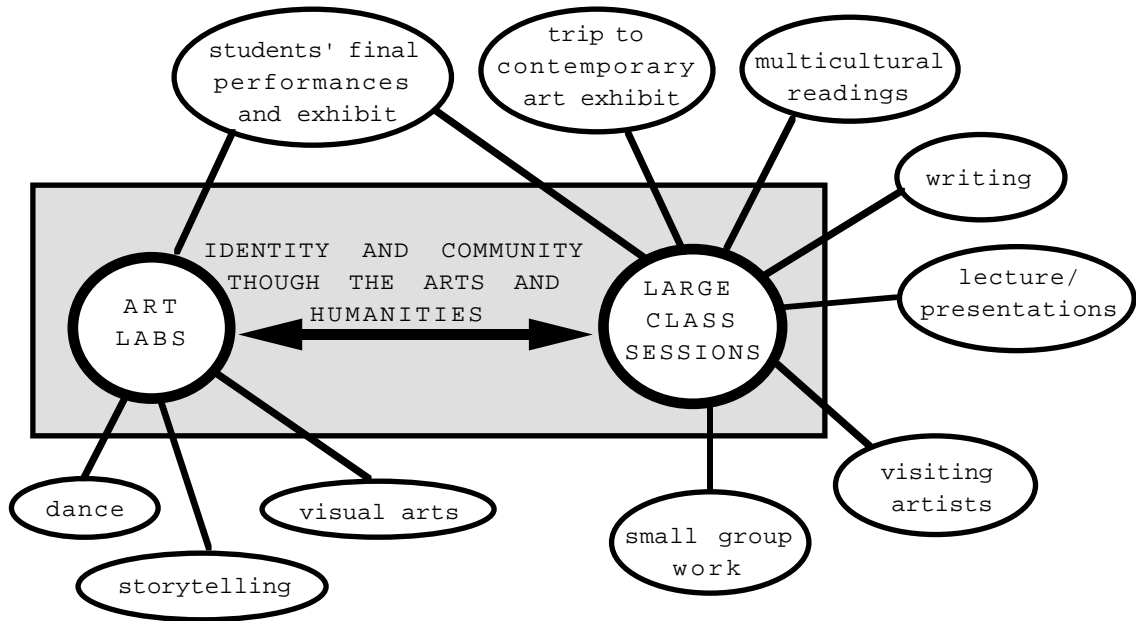
Another concept that underlies each of the arts is the synergism between form and content. The aesthetic qualities found in formal relationships convey as much meaning as the overt subject matter or symbolism. As students learn to perceive and interpret art, they identify and respond to the aesthetic nuances of things—the “whole complex of feelings” (Briggs, 1988, p. 39) that are perceived in artistic forms. Students learn the difference between the “factual approach” of practical utility and the “creative approach,” which Briggs defines as “one of purpose, sensitivity, and the ability to visualize an emotionally and aesthetically exciting image” (p. 40). Learning from the arts means paying close attention to the forms, structure, and internal relationships of a work itself. Perceiving aesthetic form is seldom the end of the process of thinking about art, however, for lines, shapes, colors, textures, movements, and sounds serve as aesthetic conduits of complex, multi-layered, metaphoric meanings about the human condition.

As vital, living forms of expression that empower individuals and communities, the arts embody emotions and ideas that both maintain and challenge social practices. Some contemporary artists celebrate and teach about ways that their cultures have traditionally perceived and valued the world. Other contemporary artists expect a new kind of engagement from the audience and ask that people be willing to “enter” and interact with the work physically, intellectually, and emotionally to imagine the past, the present, and the future in new ways. Often confrontational and critical of social structures, language, and social practices, contemporary art may evoke uncertainty, empathy, joy, anger, or disgust.

Description of the Course

Teaching the arts, especially to academically underprepared students with little art background, is a multifaceted undertaking, for teachers need to work not only with course content but also with students’ personal experiences and feelings. To connect students’ knowledge with concepts, we chose a systemic approach to course design and instruction. In this approach, all parts of the classroom system are perceived as dynamically affecting other parts (Dobbert, Eisikovits, & Pittman, 1989). In our class, activities in the large class established the groundwork for the smaller art laboratories, and the work in the art laboratories informed learning in the large class. Themes of identity and community were woven throughout all of the activities, as shown in Figure 1 on page 8. The following section describes key aspects of the various parts of the instructional system. Narrative descriptions of classroom interactions are woven throughout to bring to life for the reader the richness of the experiences within the class context. Students’ names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Figure 1: Conceptual Map of Instructional Activities



Large Class Sessions

Twice a week for two hours, the entire class of approximately 75 students met for group discussions, guest artist presentations, creativity exercises, informal writing, lectures, and presentations. The three instructors who co-led these large sessions brought diverse disciplinary knowledge, teaching styles, and pedagogical perspectives to the class. One is a professor of American literature; another is a dancer, choreographer, writer, and teaching specialist in the humanities; and another is a sculptor, educational researcher, and assistant professor of visual arts. All three of us were present in each of the large class sessions, and we took turns leading activities and discussions.

The diversity of the class provided a fertile context for exploring cultural issues. The student population included 13 recent immigrants from Vietnam, immigrants from Africa, Iran, Hungary, and Russia; approximately 14 African American students, as well as Asian American, Hispanic American, and European American students. Besides racial and ethnic diversity, students represented a diverse range of geographical regions, social classes, sexual orientations, political orientations, religions, family situations, and physical and mental abilities.

Students contributed to the course varying levels of experience, interest, and skill in the arts. A few intended to continue to study some form of art, but the majority were taking the course to fulfill a liberal arts requirement. Although most did not have much specific art knowledge, their

knowledge of their often challenging lives gave them much to express about their worlds. Typically idealistic, many students hoped to uncover hypocrisy, improve social conditions, and promote peace. On the other hand, some students were grappling with sexuality, leaving home, illness, money, alcohol and drug use, and the paradox of seemingly unlimited possibilities and fear of failure. A number of students balanced single parenthood, several jobs, or the challenges of learning a new language.

Fiction and non-fiction selections in the multicultural text, Encountering Cultures: Reading and Writing in a Changing World (Holeton, 1995), were the starting point for students' explorations of identity and community. Topics including immigration, language and power, sexual orientation and diversity, bicultural identity, and social power helped students understand the unwritten rules that are part of every culture and to empathize with individuals of different cultures. Many students were challenged by reading first person perspectives of cultures about which they held stereotyped preconceptions, or prejudices, and other students were affirmed by reading about aspects of their own culture they may never have seen articulated in print. In weekly reading responses, students were asked to identify and explain metaphors, discuss issues from the point of view of the authors or characters, and make connections between the readings and their own lives.

Small groups functioned as important pedagogical systems in the large class for helping students learn cognitively, socially, and creatively, and they served an especially vital role in helping students connect social issues to their own lives. We placed students into 13 heterogeneous groups of five to seven students. As students discussed social issues and engaged in small group exercises, they were able to share multiple perspectives and listen to other students' stories. Groups were also a way for students to develop abilities to collaborate, build trust, give feedback, and negotiate and resolve conflicts (Bruffee, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). The intentional mix in each group provided a rich opportunity for understanding a variety of cultures. To become aware of the diverse perspectives of their peers, students discussed such things as generational differences in sexual relationships and differences between private and public languages. These exercises challenged students' cultural perceptions and required them to see their peers as situated in many different contexts. In a number of group discussions, groups made lists of the main points on large paper and taped them to the walls, graphically showing the range and diversity of thinking in the class and serving as the basis for all-class discussions.

We designed sequences of exercises and assignments to help students make personal connections with artistic and social concepts. On the second day of class, for example, we began a series of exercises to teach students about the nature of metaphor and help them focus on their own heritages. The guiding metaphor for that two week period was "tree," and the chapter that students were reading in their text at this time was about immigrant experiences. To ground students in the concrete and metaphoric characteristics of "tree," we asked them to go outdoors in their groups, find a tree, and use the following categories to brainstorm about various aspects of a tree: (a) factual: describe physical characteristics of a tree; (b) functional: what does a tree do? how is it used? (c) personal: describe personal stories and feelings about trees; (d) cultural:

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describe various symbolic, ritual, or social meanings of “tree”; and (e) metaphorical: what ideas and feelings can a tree represent? When groups returned to the classroom, we discussed these aspects of “treeness.” Students made connections between ways trees function in nature and as a resource for humans and the metaphoric, expressive attributes of trees, such as strength, endurance, protection, and rootedness, and they then made connections among those qualities to families and family lineage.

After a slide presentation about various ways to graphically represent a family lineage tree, students drew their own family trees. Sharing within groups about these drawings of family trees was particularly rich as students talked with each other about their family’s immigration experiences, ethnic backgrounds, and current location and status. In a continuation of this exercise, students wrote a personal letter to an ancestor or living person on their family tree. This writing was based on an exercise described in *Writing Your Heritage* (Dixon, 1993). The following class period, students read aloud their letter to the other members of their group, which helped them share in an even deeper way their connections to their heritages.

These concepts were given greater specificity when an African American administrator in the college talked to the class about her search for her family tree in the deep south and read aloud a bill of sale for one of her great grandparents who had been sold as a slave. In the visual art lab, concepts about family trees and heritage were expanded even further in photomontage tributes students created about the person to whom they wrote the letter. Through these multiple ways of working with concepts in the tree and heritage exercises, students were better able to root the concepts of identity and metaphor in their own experience and see how they could be manifested in art.

Visiting artists

A Bush Diversity Grant supported visiting artists, art materials, and multicultural audiovisual resources. Most importantly, the grant enabled us to invite five culturally diverse artists to show examples of their art and talk about ways their work expresses their personal and cultural identities. The visiting artists were Marilyn Lindstrom, muralist; Ta-Coumba Aiken, painter; Marci Rendon, poet and playwright; Patrick Scully, dancer; and Deja Vue, a rap group. The immediacy of hearing artists speak helped students understand the intimate links between artistic purposes, creative processes, and identity. Students were able to de-mystify art and to learn about the discipline, thoughtfulness, and vulnerability that are part of an artist’s life.

For many contemporary muralists, art is a way to build community, to instruct people about heritage, and to celebrate the dignity and vision of a neighborhood or ethnic group. When an urban muralist showed slides of her collaboratively-produced neighborhood murals, she emphasized the political and collaborative nature of mural art and the importance art can have on youth and community identity. She asked students to collaboratively create circular drawings based on cultural symbols. An African American painter, who talked about and showed the influence of African patterns and values on his work, asked students to make individual oil pastel drawings using his methods of spontaneous pattern-making.

Several of the visiting artists raised important questions about cultural diversity in contemporary society. One of the artists was a dancer who talked to students about issues of being gay in a sometimes hostile environment and about his artistic journey to create expressions that support his identity. Students' questions elicited a lively discussion. For example, upon hearing the dancer use the word "queer," one student asked, "Who is allowed to use the word 'queer'?" When members of an emerging African American rap group visited the class, they alternated between rapping and talking about their collaborative process of creating music. During a spirited discussion, the rappers answered challenging questions about power, sexuality, and profanity in their lyrics.

A Native American poet and playwright read excerpts of her poetry and talked about some of the cultural and personal barriers she faced becoming an artist. She engaged students and instructors in several activities in which they identified and expressed their cultural backgrounds. For example, she asked the class to take part in a cultural identity exercise called "Crossing the Line" (Holeton, 1995), in which she asked questions such as: "Who grew up in a house where English wasn't spoken?" "Who grew up without enough food to eat?" "Who grew up in a family that had too much to eat?" People who answered positively to any of the questions had to move to the other side of the room and face the others, thus illustrating differences in our backgrounds. She later asked us to get into groups of similar racial and gender identity (White male, Black female, Asian American male, etc.) and create impromptu performances to show the rest of the class who we are as racial and gender groups.

Students were assigned to write short response papers about any three of the visiting artists. These papers gave them a focus for thinking about how artists express identity and culture, what it is to be an artist, and differences in aesthetic stances and creative processes.

An Exhibit of Contemporary Art

For a direct encounter with contemporary art, students were assigned to attend an exhibit of eight international artists titled "no place/like home," a multimedia media show at the Walker Art Center that explored issues of cultural boundaries, cultural dislocation, and notions of "home." The works that students saw and wrote about included multi-media, walk-in replications of a South African migrant worker's shanty and an illegal party room; a full-size ramshackle wooden bridge by a Cuban artist; an installation of silhouetted scenes of obscenities of slavery by an African American artist, photographs of the desolate Northern Irish border, and a photograph of the shredded feet of a dead political prisoner. The challenging exhibit demanded considerable physical, intellectual, and emotional involvement from students.

To make critical connections among social issues and contemporary arts, students wrote a five-page paper about a work or series of works by one artist in the exhibit. As a way to help students understand the context of contemporary art, we showed slides of early modernist and post-modernist art and talked about underlying aesthetic theories. The first challenge of seeing contemporary art, however, is to perceive "clues" provided in the art work. Our assignment

handout advised students to avoid premature judgments about the exhibit until they had spent sufficient time attending to the characteristics of what they actually saw, heard, and felt:

Approach this exhibit as if you are a traveler to a strange land. Please be open-minded and gather lots of information before you make judgments about the art. Some of the works may make you uncomfortable. If they do, that means the artists have probably achieved their goal. If you are confused at first, keep trying to make connections between what you see, your readings, the critical articles, and readings in your text. Everyone's interpretations of these works will be different—there is not one interpretation that you are supposed to “get.” You may end up disliking the work and being critical of its message or how the message is communicated. That's fine, but your evaluation, whether it is positive or negative, must be based on strong evidence from the work itself.

We asked students to go through the critical stages of perceiving and describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating, but we also left room for students to respond to the work in expressive, imaginative, and personal ways.

Art Laboratories

Usually the arts are invisible to students, and—except for the popular media that shape their culture through movies, TV, CDs, and radio—the arts are something students “get,” or don't get and therefore reject. Making art is a way for students themselves to actively participate in the creation of culture and the collective understanding of contemporary life. Instead of being only consumers of culture, students construct culture anew each time they create a drawing, a dance, tell a story, or actively think about a work of art.

To help students gain greater knowledge of a specific art form and create their own visual art, dance, or storytelling, the class was divided into four smaller sections that participated for two hours each week in one of four art laboratories. Two sections of dance were offered so that we could have fewer students in each art lab. Because the primary focus was on creative processes and the construction of metaphor, we gave only basic attention to specific artistic techniques, which involve other levels of complexity that students may pursue in future courses. Instead, we emphasized artistic experiences, which can be defined as an imaginative, creative shaping of thoughts or emotions into a new entity composed of words, movements, shapes, colors, or sounds. We believe that all students are capable of artistic expression.

Although students generated their own ideas for their art work, it was important to provide examples of work by established artists to guide their work. Students' work never directly mimicked the artistic examples, however; instead, seeing the work of other artists gave students alternative ways to generate and solve their own artistic problems. In the visual art lab, for example, several videos about multicultural artists, slides, and prints of paintings modeled ways to stylize human forms by using vibrant, unrealistic colors, patterns, and flat compositional space. In the dance lab, videos of contemporary multicultural dancers modeled techniques for developing narrative in both words and movement and drawing on one's own cultural experience as a creative resource. In the storytelling lab, two visiting story tellers demonstrated

such qualities as pacing, body language, choice of language, and developing personal meaning in stories.

Besides gaining first-hand knowledge of artistic concepts, making art in the small lab classes was an important way for students to learn more about their own identities. By working with artistic materials, their bodies, or words, students constructed artistic languages to express their physical, emotional, social, cultural, and existential realities. Several examples follow that illustrate how students worked with these issues. In the dance lab, students were assigned to compose, as homework, a one minute movement study based on the metaphor of journey. Students were asked to incorporate several dance concepts they had been working with, and the dance instructor provided a theme and a broad structure that allowed for individual variations. In preparation for the assignment, she talked students through an imaginative movement journey that acted as a creative warm-up and provided students with both a kinesthetic and imaginative sense of what their process might be and where it might take them.

Individually composing and performing the midquarter study was intimidating to every dance student, yet nearly all met this challenge, some gaining significant insight about themselves as human beings and performers. In one student's study, for example, the instructor observed a clear integration of the dance concepts of level, pathway, and dynamics, with a focused, dramatic sense of motion and emotion. The student maintained a strong presence in his movement, which is perhaps the most important quality sought in student performances. After all of the journey studies had been performed (in pairs, to alleviate self-consciousness), the instructor asked students to write about their own composing process. This student's account revealed that he used an imaginative narrative to shape a performance based on personal feelings from his own life circumstances. Although his study was performed in silence, he had used music when he was composing at home to set up kinesthetic and emotional associations. Interestingly, he chose a classic hero's journey as the basis of his study, setting out to destroy a dragon that represented the evil in his life, depression. An imaginary spear represented courage and the support of his friends and relatives. What was compelling about this study was the students' ability to synthesize feeling and form to explore what was probably for him the most pressing aspect of his identity at the time.

Students often surprised themselves with their own artistic abilities. When a student in the visual art lab drew her interpretation of "home," the female tree-figure that emerged on the large sheet of black paper seemed to flow out of her fingers. Blocking out chatter in the classroom, she concentrated solely on the image, as if she knew exactly what would evolve. Drawing seemed to be a natural mode of expression for her. Earlier, when the class brainstormed metaphors for "home," this student contributed "mother's breasts," which became the basis of the drawing about what home means to her. From the instructor's perspective, she seemed to have considerable experience in art, but when she was asked if she had much art in her childhood, she quickly responded "oh no, no, no" as if warning that learning about art was an impossibility in the rough inner city environment in which she had grown up. This was one of her first opportunities to artistically express ideas and feelings, and she entered into the activity with the

energy that she might have used in her training as an athlete. She was swept into the sensuality of working with oil pastels, and she produced a rich, vibrant image that was meaningful to her.

Other students in the visual art lab found their own ways to express what home means to them. The majority of students were recent Southeast Asian immigrants, and many of their oil pastel drawings included images of their land, such as mountains, rice paddies, and temples. They showed historical tensions in their country by using symbols of conflict such as clashing fists within a heart. Drawings by other students used less specific cultural references. To one student, home was a single lit candle on a rock. For another home was a butterfly soaring out of the grasp of a hand, a symbol of both growing up and of the butterflies in his environment. To another home was the cliff he was standing on while he contemplated soaring into his future. None of the students' drawings was a literal illustration of home; instead, each relied on metaphor to convey ideas about home as a memory, a longing, a sense of belonging, or a place from which to soar.

Conditions for Creative Learning

Resistance to the arts comes from many sources, including students' lack of belief in their own artistic abilities, insufficient understanding of the relevance of the arts to their own life or career, or the common perception of the arts as elitist, inaccessible, or frivolous. Resistance to cultural diversity is engendered by isolation, mass media, and social pressure. Given these beliefs, how could we help students become more open to worlds that are unfamiliar to them? We found there were four conditions that especially enabled students to care about their participation in class, to think and act creatively, to become more tolerant, to respond critically to a variety of ideas and art forms, and to develop meaningful content in their own art work. As we elucidate these conditions for creativity, we return to previously described activities to suggest how they not only served pedagogical functions but set up an environment that promoted successful learning.

The Creation of Personal Meaningfulness

To be willing to take artistic and social risks, it is important that students feel that what they are doing is authentic and self-expressive, that it is in some way contributing to a larger good, and that the process itself is worth doing. Personal meaningfulness arises from the utilization of students' own knowledge and life experiences, and focused and enthusiastic participation is more likely when it is clear that what they create is relevant to their lives. The construction of personal metaphors was an especially important factor in animating ideas for students, as they called on memory, perception, and conceptual knowledge to shape a meaningful way of perceiving and expressing their lives. The intrinsic pleasure of making art and the sense of "flow" that can arise from the integration of mind, body, emotions with materials and symbolic forms also added to personal meaningfulness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Supportive Social Climate

Because both students and instructors were exploring new territories in learning issues of diversity, active communal participation was a crucial aspect of the class. Establishing a sense of community within the classroom was the first important factor for encouraging risk-taking, an understanding of art as shared communication, and a tolerance for diversity. Small groups helped students to feel personally connected to several others within the large class of 75 students. A second factor was the willingness of instructors to engage in the activities of the guest artists, to participate with students in many of the creativity exercises, and to model team work by negotiating with and supporting one another. A third community-building component was the final performances and exhibition. Rehearsing, preparing art work for exhibition, and helping each other gave students an opportunity to make decisions, collaborate, and take responsibility for the success of their work.

Open, Structured Assignments and Instruction

The structure and delivery of assignments, which were designed to help students with little prior art experience, were important to students' ability to think critically and creatively, understand artistic concepts, grow in their ability to deal with diversity issues, and express their own personal and cultural knowledge. Sequential activities, as described in the tree and heritage exercises, enabled students to practice concepts and processes in multiple ways, and repetition of concepts in visual, musical, verbal, and kinesthetic modes offered students with different learning styles more than one mode for successful comprehension and articulation of ideas. Technical, formal, and conceptual constraints in the assignments helped students focus their thinking and work toward specific goals, but sufficient room remained in the assignments for students to work in expressive and imaginative ways.

Explicit Teaching of Creative Processes

Our instruction alternated between a practical and theoretical understanding of creativity. When accomplished artists create, they integrate their artistic training, life experience, emotions, and aesthetic knowledge into a complex practice (Gruber, 1989). Experienced artists are able to make complex decisions based on their knowledge, but inexperienced students are often overwhelmed with the complexity of making and interpreting art, and they are unable to find meaning in what they do. One of the challenges of working with students with little previous experience or confidence in the arts is to help them quickly learn enough formal principles, symbol systems, and cultural meanings to be able to generate ideas, develop their work, and make critical evaluations. By participating in activities that focused on components of creative processes such as brainstorming, metaphoric thinking, spontaneous play, elaborating, synthesizing, and working with feedback, students gradually acquired strategies and confidence that helped them accomplish their final projects. Opportunities for reflection helped students become aware of the thoughts and feelings that often seem elusive when one is engaged in creative processes.

Making Connections

Our evaluation of students' learning and the success of the course was primarily based on students' art work and writing, for it was in these products that we could see an increase in their ability to perceive and analyze relationships and interpret concepts in art, culture, and society. We considered students' awareness of their own learning to be a major objective, so we asked them to write reflective papers about how they made connections among the various activities in which they had engaged over the quarter. To prepare students to write this paper, we gave them a visual "map" similar to that provided in Figure 1 with a list of the components of the course, and we talked about how concepts had been woven throughout the multiple activities. The following section describes some of the outcomes of their art-making and students' perception of their learning in relationship to the five goals we had established for the course.

Deepened Awareness of Their Own Identities in Relationship to Their Own and Other Cultures

Students' writing and art work showed that they came to new understandings about who they are, where they come from, and the complexity of their alliances. A number of students noted a renewed pride in their own ethnic community and a new consciousness of being members of not only an ethnic community but of multiple communities based on common interests and goals. Several students wrote about how the class had helped them reflect on the taken-for-granted patterns of their daily existence. Seeing their peers' work also helped students perceive commonalities; for example, a student's performance of a story about growing up in the 1980s resonated with students from both suburban and inner city backgrounds.

Sensitization to the Values and Experiences of Diverse Peoples

There were a number of times throughout the quarter when students expressed discomfort with our focus on cultural diversity, and they grappled with this uneasiness in their writing and discussions. Although they may have abstractly known about the concept of cultural difference, many students had never publicly identified their own race or ethnicity or talked about such issues with someone from a different culture. At first, a number of students were uncomfortable and angry at being asked to take a public stand on their identity, especially European Americans, but later they wrote that they understood why they had been asked to do so and described a new appreciation of their own identities and an awareness of differences within cultures. Many students wrote about positive shifts in their perception of other people, including immigrants and gays, and they wrote of a new sense of respect and empathy for others.

Students indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to work with peers from diverse backgrounds. Some expressed amazement that students in their group had very different ideas about such fundamental subjects as the nature of God, community, and marriage. Students wrote that they valued the lessons in negotiation, collaboration, and responsibility that the groups had offered them and thought that their participation in small groups was a valuable

way to learn and to feel more connected to others. They also valued working with people who had different learning styles, and noted that seeing how other students approached ideas and processes served as important models about new ways to work. Students also wrote about the customary isolation that they feel at the University, and they were pleased that they felt very much a part of this class, had made new friends, and felt that the class itself had become a community.

Sensitization to the Ways that the Arts Express the Complexity of Contemporary Life

Students came to a new understanding of the power of art to make their lives more meaningful, to strengthen individual and communal voices, and to improve communities. In a sense, students claimed a personal stake in the arts. Previously, many students had very little interest in the arts; they thought of the Walker Art Center as something that was outside of their world, and they resisted making a trip there. After their visit, however, students wrote about the Walker as an exciting, relevant place that they hope to revisit, and they were grateful for being introduced to the work in the exhibit. The exhibit was complex and difficult, but students' writing demonstrated that they had met the challenge with empathy, imagination, and insight.

Ability to Use Artistic Languages to Understand and Express Ideas, Feelings, and Experiences

Students' writing showed that they were able to use metaphors to illuminate their own ideas, and many wrote about their learning in terms of a journey, a bridge, and a circle. Although most of the students initially lacked confidence in their artistic and creative abilities, by the end of the quarter they were able to express ideas and feelings through their own visual art, storytelling, or dance. As they experienced some successes in the art laboratories, students' work showed an increase in confidence and willingness to take expressive risks, and in their ability to generate divergent ideas, think metaphorically, and refine their work.

By the time of the final performances and exhibition, many students were able to bring their work to a fairly high level of artistry. In the visual art lab, for example, few of the students had much artistic experience beyond elementary school, and their drawing style itself was relatively crude, but an emphasis on shape and pattern instead of illusionistic rendering helped them create works in which colors were richly varied, harmonious, and lively, textures were well-developed, and there was a sense of compositional unity. With few exceptions, students in the dance lab also had little or no experience in creative dance. Furthermore, nearly half of them were males, a group who in our culture does not identify with dance as a gender-appropriate art form. The goals were to encourage them to move freely and unselfconsciously in their bodies, to explore new and expressive ways of moving, and to collaborate successfully in their performing groups. The dances, choreographed by nine different groups, employed movement language uniquely expressive of their ideas, each dance appearing very different from any other. A sense of collaborative effort was evident in the focused participation of all performers.

Ability to Deal with Complexity and Ambiguity

Although the participation level in both the large class and the laboratories was generally high, some students showed ambivalence to what we were doing, which we attribute to students' initial confusion about the complexity of the course, resistance to some of the activities, and discomfort with our non-linear methods. At first, many students thought that the multiple activities in the class were too disconnected, but eventually they were able to synthesize information and find common themes among art, readings, art lab activities, and their own lives. Over time, students' work showed that they were able to function within the complexity of the class, and the depth of their writing was evidence that many moved from dualism and premature closure to a tolerance for ambiguity, paradox, complexity, and alternative perspectives.

Implications for Developmental Education

We discovered that applying the arts to issues of identity and community is a fruitful endeavor when combined with active learning strategies. Students, many of whom have had mediocre or unsuccessful prior experiences in schools, were able to successfully express and explore their diverse backgrounds and abilities. Although some structural characteristics of this course will change over time, we will continue to develop and refine strategies for establishing creative learning conditions that promote diversity in both the content and process of teaching. We offer our description of the course not as a model, but as an invitation for developmental educators to turn to the arts as a way to deepen students' critical thinking, creativity, and insight about social and cultural diversity. The experiential, holistic processes of making art provide valuable models for active, learning-centered instructional strategies for working with academically underprepared students.

The study of visual and performing arts showed students ways that the arts critique, explore, and celebrate life in contemporary America and the world. By having students see the complexity of art-making through the eyes of artists and through their own roles as creators and critics, we hoped to imbue them with some of the passion for art that comes from understanding the arts as their birthright. Making art was a way for students to put their experiences and feelings into metaphoric, aesthetic forms to share with other people. Students worked out an understanding of issues for themselves by having an opportunity to participate in a learning community that examined and shared perspectives on significant artistic and social issues. By critically reframing and expressively imagining their own experiences, students built bridges of experience between personal stories and conceptual structures so that they were able to theorize and symbolize their own lives and think at a deeper level about what their lives mean.

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