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Reflections on The Art Education Program

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The Final Report

The Art Education Program (AEP) started because of an interest in the transition into a post-secondary level of arts academics from a secondary school level. The AEP aimed to ease the transition from high school into university by providing support to students interested in pursuing the visual arts. The outcome of the program became a lot more than a mentorship, but it became an opportunity for participants to critically engage with their own art practice, and professionalize their skills, and created a small community that fostered growth, creativity, and experimentation. I believed the AEP would be a good experiment to see where the secondary school curriculum could better foster growth for visual artist, but the program would also be a place to foster my growth as an instructor to see if teaching in the visual arts is a path I would like to pursue.

A Brief Summary

Fall Semester

In order to establish what the program would cover I used a few strategies to prepare a preliminary summary. I pulled notes from my time on the Arts and Humanities Student Council, and I had discussions with students both within and outside the arts faculty. Finally, I took a look at what first year university students experience in comparison to grade twelve students

by using the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum and Western University's first year visual arts syllabi. I organized presentations for two high schools. I decided during my conversation with the teacher to not only promote the program, but also speak on the benefit of continuing with arts in a post-secondary degree. It became a beneficial presentation for my project but also as an informative session for students who may have questions relating to the upcoming university applications. I sent out an application form following the presentation and received five interested students.

I created a basic timeline that I wanted to follow in order to be prepared for the culminating exhibition at satellite. I also created several PowerPoints and workshop activity ideas but waited to get feedback from the students before solidifying any plans. I sent out a Doodle poll to the five starting participants, and we selected an hour to meet every week.

January

Beginning the new semester meant beginning the practical part of the Advanced Art Education Program. The month of January was occupied with sorting out the kinks in the theoretical side of the program to make it most effect for the experiential side.

A crucial step in turning the theoretical plan into a fully functional program was communicating with the students. It became a challenge to find an effective and simple way of communicating online, but in the end I used multiple social media platforms and email to send out information when not able to do so in person.

Our first meeting took place late January, and due to high school exams was the only meeting until the beginning of February. Meeting number one was mainly focused on introductions, icebreakers, goal setting, and a building tour. The program plan was adjusted

based on the participants input, and I moved into February with renewed ideas to experiment with.

February

Unfortunately, one of the participants decided that they could not continue with the program due to their school commitments and extracurriculars. The February eleventh meeting focused on post-secondary options for arts education. Drawing from questions asked during my presentation to the secondary school classes, I compiled relevant information about university and college visual arts programs.

I briefly discussed different types of artist residencies, and what an application for one may look like. We discussed places where an artist could intern or find employment. The participants were able to start recognizing a large variety of places they could find work that still allows for art creation or study.

The last portion of the session was a simple discussion about where the participants would like to go with their individual pieces for the culminating exhibition. A few expressed interest in learning a few art making techniques, and I took the notes they gave and prepared to adjust the workshops to allow time for some more hands-on activities.

Based on feedback from the February eleventh meeting, I concluded one of the first skill building workshops should be stretching canvases. Based on the atmosphere in the group, it seemed like the participants greatly appreciated learning about a new skill and different materials, knowledge they can take back to their classroom.

March

The beginning of March meant the culminating exhibition was quickly approaching. The Painting Workshop was meant to give the students the opportunity to learn how to use spray paint, which was a medium they requested to work with. Though the students were excited to learn a new skill, I was actually looking to teach the participants to loosen up and allow creativity regardless of the result.

Taking advantage of the open sculpture workshop, I took the participants down to the metal and wood workshop. The students were given tutorials on the machinery and were challenged to build a sculpture from scrap wood. An unintended result of the sculpture workshop was the confidence building for the students. The participants went from asking for my help to showing enough confidence of doing it on their own and being proud of their work.

Visiting Satellite Project Space was important for the students to start visualizing the space available for their exhibition. They started to discuss what the possibilities open to them, including installation work, sculpture, and large paintings. Another part of visiting the space was seeing that the participants got to see all the parts of an exhibition in progress. We also did a mini critique of some of the pieces to practice critically discussing art, which helped them to start thinking critically about art.

April

One unfortunate fact I had to face at the beginning of the month was that one of the participants had stopped attending meetings, I decided that the exhibition would consist only of the three students who had been committed to the program consistently.

The majority of April's meetings consisted of the background work it takes to put on an art show. We decided on installation dates, the exhibition title, reception date, installation

materials, poster and publication design, and we curated the exhibition. We also had skill building workshops on artwork documentation and artist statements.

The closing reception was held on May 3rd, in conjunction with socializing and celebration, the students also participated in a short art critique.

Reflection on The Project

The AEP was quite a bit of work for a single individual, and I could not put as much effort into it as I would have liked to based on the limitation of being a fulltime student with all the extracurricular and work-related commitments that come with it. Additionally, it was also a concern if the program would even get off the ground with such a limited foundation to build on.

After attempting to contact ten art instructors in various secondary school institutions, I received only two responses. Following presentations to two different schools and over 70 students total, I had to be concerned about if any secondary students would even be interested in participating in the program when they would also already be committed to their own extracurriculars and part time jobs. After five applications for the program turned into three active participants, I was a little concerned about the affect the program would have. However, the three students I worked with showed that they truly were passionate about advancing their artistic knowledge, and I ended up enjoying the individualized approach that such a small group provided.

The program developed its own small and supportive community, but I see an importance for some sort of academic art program in the greater London community as well. As someone who grew up in London, I never participated in visual arts programs outside of my

high school experience until I reached University. Providing students with the opportunity to engage with a more analytical and unrestricted extracurricular academic art program gives young artist the ability to reach beyond the restrictive institutional structure of grading and guidelines they face in their schools. An academic art program also puts visual art on the same level as STEM subjects that frequently have summer camps, tutoring sessions, or clubs, that become valuable experiences when pursuing a career or higher level of education.

Reflection on the Partnership

I enjoyed the partnership with Satellite Project Space, because I see the possibility of Satellite continuing a program similar to the AEP. With the goals that the Gallery Coordinator, Eeva Siivonen, has for the gallery, Satellite will hopefully become a cultural community centre for London visual artists.

During the first semester of our fourth year SASAH seminar, Shelley Niro took the class on a trip to Hamilton where we attended three different gallery spaces. One space, called Centre 3, really intrigued me. Though there was a more traditional art gallery and shop in the space, Centre 3 also ran a variety of community outreach programs. The one most relevant to my project was an art class that actually allowed for students to get high school credits. This gave students who may not be most successful in the traditional educational institution or students looking to further their learning the opportunity to further their academic lives as well as their artistic ones.

I believe Centre 3 has established itself as an important community centre in Hamilton, and if Satellite were able to provide London youth with similar opportunities to increase their artist knowledge than we may see a growth in the London Visual Arts community.

In relation to how the partnership with Satellite and the AEP, I believe it could have been more successful. My project was an idea formed before the partnership was ever established. I believe there might have been an idea for my partnership with Satellite that did not quite mesh with the goals of my project. I think that this miscommunication or perhaps simply my own stubbornness in seeing my idea realized, prevented me from fully utilizing Satellite as a partner. I am immensely grateful for the two weeks provided to me to exhibit the student's work. Based on their response at the closing reception, they are all now significantly more interested in pursuing arts in their futures. I am also personally grateful for all the mentorship Eeva Siivonen provided me, as I have never taught a program like this or organized an exhibition on my own.

Reflection on the SASAH Learning Experience

I came into my university experience not having expected to pursue SASAH or the Visual Arts. I was dead set on pursuing Criminology and Law until maybe a week before I accepted my University offer. I was enticed to the SASAH program, and thus the visual arts, by the idea of interdisciplinary learning. I have always been someone who has tried everything at least once and wanted to learn as much as possible. I think that my quick switch into a completely different field of study than what I had prepared for in high school made me realize just how

different the post-secondary expectations for arts academics were very different from those in secondary school.

The Ontario Secondary School Curriculum only lists two visual arts credits at the grade twelve level. Both courses emphasize learning design skills, material processes, and creative processes. When compared to the syllabus of a University first year Bachelor of Fine Arts course, the secondary school curriculum is missing important factors such as conceptual methodologies, a wider depth of cultural knowledge, contemporary art knowledge, and critical communication skills.

When trying to create an educational program that bridges the gap from secondary to post-secondary knowledge I may have relied on my experience and skills learned in the Visual Arts to teach the students, but it was my experience in SASAH that recognized where the gaps were, why they existed, and how to fix them. SASAH classes may have all had specific topics, from postmodernism, to uncreative writing, to digital humanities, to living empathetically, each course required the students to problem solve to create project or answer challenging concepts. SASAH courses have increased my critical thinking abilities and forced me to ask more about the process of learning.

I have shared similar experiences with the majority of my graduating cohort over four years, and I have learned how certain people, including myself, react to different challenges and learning concepts. We have also been asked many times to step outside the traditional institutional style of learning, which includes grades and guidelines, to form our own thoughts and conclusions.

In conclusion, I believe the structure, or lack of structure, within SASAH has made me realize what kind of teacher I would like to be but also how the education system needs to adapt to become more reflective of what kind of intellectual thought processes are required within the Arts and Humanities.

My Project in My Profession

My curiosity in education began when I was the Crafts programmer at a summer camp. I had not yet entered university, but I believe the experience of teaching 6-16-year olds how to be creative, and how you can express yourself through art making, definitely came back when I was deciding to pursue the Arts.

In my second year at Western University, I was the Visual Arts Department Representative on Arts and Humanities Student Council. The position pushed my critical eye on visual arts academics, and then this critical view point expanded when I later held the position of Vice President of Academics. The experience on Student Council allowed me to engage with other students and faculty about Arts and Humanities education. Once again, this experience came up when pushing me towards pursuing a career in academics.

In my third year, I experienced arts education in a European institution during my exchange at Lancaster University. I appreciated the experience as a visual artist myself, but also because it expanded my way of working in an academic institution that was similar but also had some significant differences than those in Canada.

Though the idea for the AEP originally began in second year, these other experiences effected how it came into reality. I have gathered from instructing and creating this program,

that though I love teaching and interacting with students, just as I had when I worked at summer camp, it is really the planning process I enjoy. I like to learn about what people learn and how they do it. I like to help other figure out better ways of learning or what they should study next. I like the programming aspect of teaching, the fabrication of a course of study and how to best follow through with it. The second semester of my project taught me that you can plan and research as much as you would like, but you need to be there, to be the one actually teaching and interacting with the students, to see if they are benefiting from the course you had laid out.

I do not know if I will still become a high school art teacher like I have been telling my family members, because I am not sure that the way I would like to teach would be best suited for the traditional educational institution. However, I know that I am interested in academics and learning and helping others to learn and grow. I was preparing for an artist talk for the Visual Arts half of my degree at the same time as I was reflecting on parts of the AEP, and I realized that my art practice also coordinated with the idea of teaching. I like to provide the tools for others to create, and in that way I am a part of everything they are creating. The same philosophy applies to teaching. If I am a part of how someone learns something, I am a part of everything they learn and become afterwards.

Reflecting on the Presentation

Creating the final presentation was a challenge in terms of summarizing the entirety of an eight-month long project into seven minutes. The presentation was also one of the first times I had to flip the focus from what the students in the program were learning, on to what I

was learning. I began with summarizing the goal of minimizing the jump between high school and post-secondary art education. Then I discussed the three main aspects of the project, education, research, and instruction. In terms of education, there was that of the students, as I hoped to increase their knowledge of the visual arts, and also the topic of my education and learning. The research half is part from the work and fact finding that went into all the lesson planning and half from the research provide form conducting the program in an experimental way of providing education to students. The instruction was my own practice in teaching and leading a group of students.

The presentation then provided the basic background information on the differences between curriculum in grade twelve and first year. Grade twelve courses focus on creating and presenting work using the creative process and elements and principles of design, which is an extension of all the pervious secondary level visual arts courses. The course is supposed to reflect, respond, and critically analyze societal connections. Finally grade twelve's must also know foundation level techniques and terms. In regard to an example of a first-year university syllabus in the Studio Arts, students must have a depth and breadth of historical and contemporary knowledge, have knowledge of conceptual and material methodologies, and critical written and oral communication skills. The presentation also detailed a summary and the goals for the students who participated in the program, which were as follows:

“To gain a better understanding of what it means to be an art student, and a student artist by expanding knowledge through individual exploration outside of the secondary school curriculum. To increase Professional Development skills such as; writing artist statements, artwork documentation, participation in art critiques, and engagement in the London art

community. To further their Art Education by creating self-driven work, to better understand options for art education in post-secondary institutions and learn in a smaller group atmosphere.”

The presentation goes on to discuss the process of outreaching to high schools and shows the form students had to submit as an application for the program. During discussion with the program director at Satellite Gallery, we decided that a maximum of six to eight students for the program would be ideal. We discussed what we thought I should include in the questionnaire for selecting participants. The questions covered basic contact information, questions relating to the students’ experience with different mediums, how long they’ve been in art courses, and what they would like to personally achieve if selected to participate in the program. In the end five students submitted an application. I discussed the process of getting the project started, including communication problems, locations of meetings, getting student feedback, and creating a schedule. I also discussed the topics of the meetings, the workshops were divided into informative lectures on what art school is and how to apply for it, to skill-based tutorials such as canvas stretching and art work documentation. The presentation finished with the dates the culminating art show would exhibit at Satellite.

In conclusion, the experience during my Experiential Learning Credit was successful because I benefited from culminating all the passion I had for academics over the past four years into a program that allowed me to experiment with teaching and academic development, as well as provided a unique experience to three very passionate young artists. Upon the end of the program I sent out a poll to the students asking for their input on the program. Every single

one of them stated that their favourite part of the program was the hands-on learning experience they received. I would have to agree with them, as the experiential component of this credit was what made the experience a better learning opportunity.

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