

Western University

Scholarship@Western

SASAH 4th Year Capstone and Other Projects:
Publications

School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and
Humanities (SASAH)

Winter 2020

Experiential Learning: SASAH Final Report

Elora Sinnott

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sasahr4pub>



Part of the [Art Education Commons](#), [Art Practice Commons](#), [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [Painting Commons](#)

Experiential Learning

SASAH Final Report

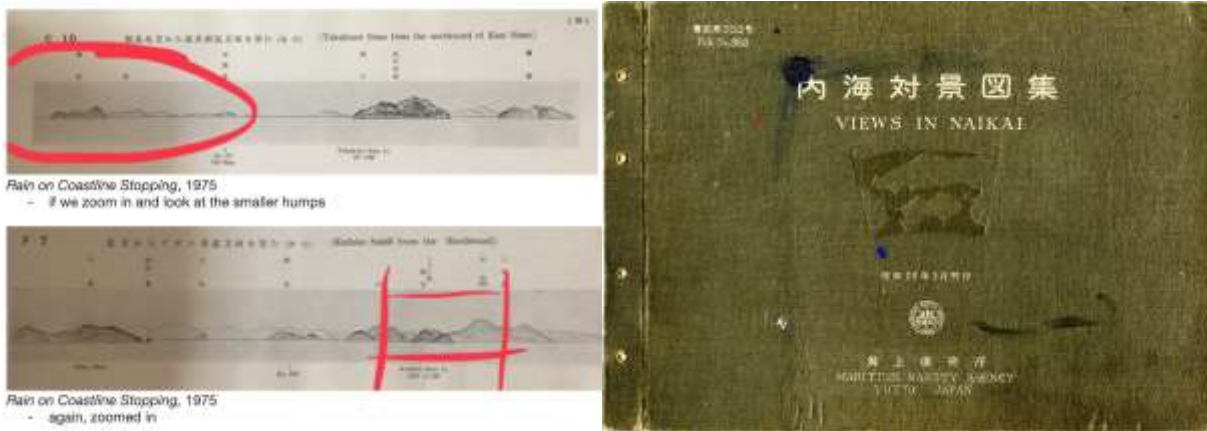
Elora Sinnott

Digitalizing Art History, an Experience

This internship was based on the idea of digitalizing the art world to keep up with everchanging technology, and to provide access to all of those who would be interested. While CulturePlex at Western worked on designing a platform for these digital catalogues, our task was researching these four major Canadian artists: Greg Curnoe, Paterson Ewen, Betty Goodwin, and Joyce Wieland. The information we are able to garner would be the foundation material for the bibliographies and other written pieces on the artists and their work. During the very first meeting with Professor John Hatch, we began to outline a plan and roles for all the interns. I was interested in interviews and archival work. However, the interviewing stage would not happen for some time as the project was in its earliest stages. Myself and another intern, Leah Abaza, would work closely over the semester going through the archives, recording and sorting through information on individual artists.

I was fortunate to work closely on Greg Curnoe and Paterson Ewen, who were both London, based artists. This meant there is an extensive range of archival information at both Western University's McIntosh Gallery and at the London Museum. Our work usually was at either of those facilities, pouring over clippings from old newspaper articles, exhibition catalogues, and books. Our task was quite simple, but very tedious and at times, eye blurring. After booking times at either the McIntosh Gallery or London Museum, I would go through all the files on Greg Curnoe and Paterson Ewen. This involved taking pictures of each newspaper clipping, exhibition catalogue, or book that would come from multiple folders. The times I went alone were the most tedious, since Leah and I would generally split the files 50/50 to speed up the process. At times we

would leave after hour's worth of sorting and picture taking with three to five hundred photos on our phones. After each visit, I would upload the information to a shared folder on OWL, which people could access for their own work. One of our much more interesting tasks involved searching for potential coastlines that Paterson Ewen used in his works, those being *Coastal Trip*, *Rain on Coastline Stopping*, and *Coastline with Precipitation*, 1974. We were given a second-hand copy of *Views in Naikai*, owned by



Paterson Ewen. It was believed this was the source of many coastlines he used in his work. Through the simple method of compare and contrast, Leah and I were able to derive potential coastlines he had referenced in his work. (Link of segment for coastlines: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/paterson-ewen/key-works/coastline-with-precipitation>)

Many skills came to attention during this internship, some that I already had that were further developed, while others were new. Working in an archive, searching for information was a very repetitive task. For hours I would look, photograph, flip, photograph, (repeating this process) and then moving on to the next piece. This process involved a lot of patience, time, and an ability to remember previous photographs taken. At times there would be copies of the same newspaper clipping or book and remembering whether it had been documented or not saved a lot of time and effort. This archival work

also touched on time management skills and knowing your limitations. There was also an aspect of collaboration, especially when Leah and I dealt with the coastline task. It involved a lot of speculation and brainstorming to narrow down our choices. We had gone through around forty coastlines, going back and forth, debating which ones could have been used as a direct source, or perhaps simply as inspiration. This task also called for attention to detail, which helped us to finalize our observations.

The skills that were used are many that have been applied to my life but were further developed with this internship. Something somewhat new, was the comparison of coastlines and Ewen's coastline art, which involved thinking more outside the box, and like an artist. While most of the skills I further refined, had been ones I brought with me to university, the "thinking outside the box" aspect has been heavily influenced by my experience in SASAH and as an Art History/Studio Art student. Up until university, my education has been very traditional and structured. Therefore I was provided little room for my own pursuits and interests that I have and am yet to discover. With SASAH I've been able to discover new interests and am given enough freedom to explore them. One of the major reasons I was so interested in SASAH, to begin with, is because of the diversity among courses. This really enabled new discoveries, and a less restricting approach to assignments let me explore in more than one direction. Of course, I have developed other skills through my experience with this internship and through the program, but those I believe are more generic and could have been accomplished through other studies and pursuits. Thinking outside the box, and pushing past limitations is the skill SASAH has encouraged and aided me during this internship.

SASAH has not only been a huge source of learning and knowledge but the opportunities it enables, including this internship, are crucial experiences for university students. An internship is very valuable in the development of skills and knowledge that can be transferred to the workforce. One of the most important things participating in an internship does is provide the opportunity to connect with people in your field of interest or across disciplines. In this case, it has allowed me to connect with people working in the art history field as historians, curators, and people who are looking to enter into the industry. The couple things that have been stressed to me as a student who will soon enter into the workforce is, "Being smart can only get you so far, the ability to communicate is essential," and, "Connections are everything." Connections give you access points across fields, and the ability to communicate is simply an important aspect of human interaction. Internships as a whole promote these essential qualities. They give you access to connections and the time to develop relationships between individuals. For these reasons alone, I think internships are an important part of the university experience.

In addition, it also allows people to explore different places of work to determine if they could be a potential fit. Companies appreciate and want loyalty. Jumping from job to job may not be successful depending on the discipline. An internship allows for some exploration and experience before it becomes a critical aspect of one's career. This internship, in particular, has given me insight into the art world, especially in regards to art historians and archival work. While it was a good experience it has shown me that I would need more in a job than very repetitive tasks. I enjoy changes and interesting challenges, like the task that involved coastlines. It has also helped me determine what future choices I have regarding education and career options. I enjoy art history,

especially being so hands-on with it, but personally, I need a larger variety of tasks. Now my direction is leaning more towards behind the scenes special effects or events planning. They are both more diverse and even more hands-on but still incorporate skills I have developed with this internship. What I would be interested in seeing is the incorporation of untraditional types of internships. Ones that perhaps are more geared to an artist at work, and what it would be like working in a studio atmosphere instead of the classic office type.

Internships are a great source of learning experience that is not only beneficial in developing skills but also determining what you want from a job. It allows for exploration so that later, you are better able to articulate what you want or do not want in a job. This can also be said for future education. As an undergraduate student, I am still debating on entering the workforce after graduation, or continuing my studies. This experience has helped me process my options and possibilities. It has enabled me to be apart of a project that will be accessible to people globally, and influence future artists. (Link to Paterson Ewen: Life & Work: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/paterson-ewen>)

For the Love of Art

Arts 4 All Kids is a non-profit organization that provides education to children about the arts, which included lessons in music, theory, art, dance, and creative writing. As a volunteer there, it was my job to teach and inspire a love for the arts in the kids. I was placed in the creative writing department and taught two sessions on Monday nights, with two other volunteers. For each session, we would develop a lesson plan for the kids that would teach them skills and encourage their creativity in writing. From this, I have found there is a value to having courses that engage with the community and much to be learned through participating in one. This CEL as experience alone taught me new lessons and brought about reflection on my future self.

Entering into this CEL I was unsure of what to expect of the program and even myself. Having previously done an internship, I was fairly comfortable with all the assignments and the process of going through the motions. I, however, was unsure as to what the environment would be like and somewhat nervous to start. Thankfully meeting with Karen beforehand gave me some insight into what was expected of me, and after the first session, I no longer felt uncomfortable with not knowing. The children while weary with me at the start became much more comfortable and relaxed in my presence. That had to have been my greatest worry, not being able to connect with or somehow make the kids comfortable with me. Since most of my past work and volunteer experience dealt with children, it was an irrational fear but one I had nonetheless. In the end, the kids were comfortable sharing their work with me, which I took pride in. One



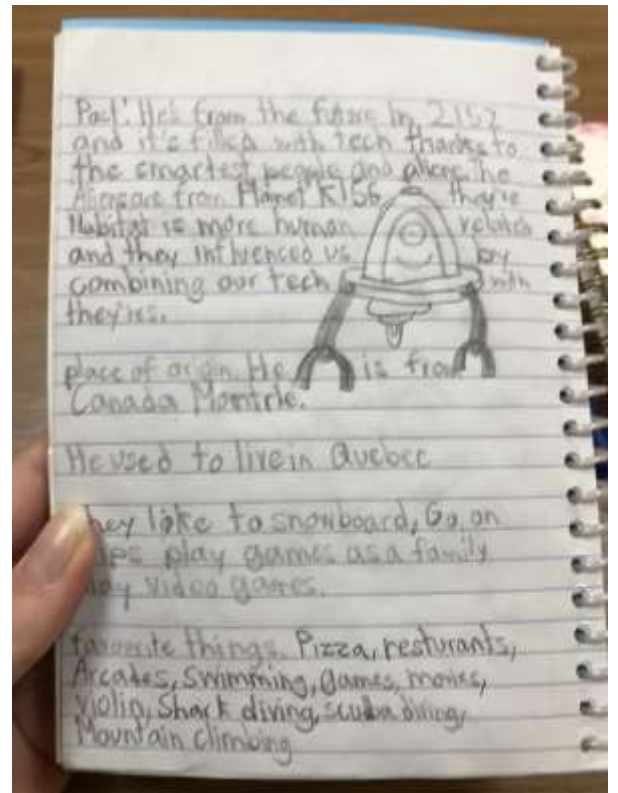
of the more active boys and I even ended up exchanging drawings we made when he had successfully finished his poem for the end of the year Gala.

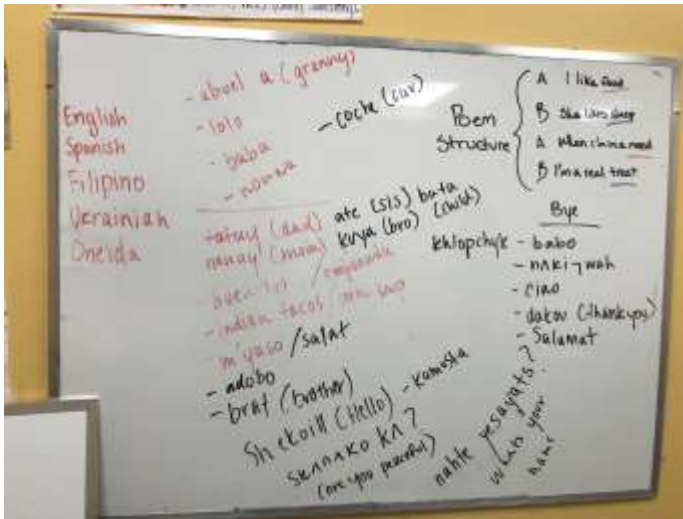
From the start, I had a harder time relating this CEL with an academic perspective, mainly because it is unlike anything I have experienced in an academic setting. While the whole CEL revolved around education, it lacked the feeling of intense academic work. I did not struggle to make it to my placement and found no displeasure in any aspect of the work relating to it. I even enjoyed researching then developing the lesson plans, and later writing my written reflections. This is potentially due to the shift from University to Elementary school learning that occurred. When at Arts 4 All Kids I could pull myself back to a place where learning was not stressful and become myself, a child again. It was a pleasant reprieve from the constricting routine of a university student's life.

From a more personal standpoint, this was a great experience that led to personal exploration and enrichment. Prior to this experience, I had not seriously thought of teaching as a future career option. To me, it was more of a backup plan if Plan A was to fail. One of my many goals in life is to find a job that I will enjoy, and be able to wake up in the mornings with little struggle. Now because of the amount of enjoyment I had throughout this experience, I am leaning more towards teaching. I understand that every job has its positives and negatives, but teaching seems to have more in favour than against. I told one friend about my thoughts, and she thought going back to teach was more like regressing in life, since you're not physically moving to other institutes. Perhaps I romanticize it, but I believe teaching would enable me to have a positive impact on the world by benefiting my community and future generations.

There are many things this CEL has brought to the table for me, but it is hard to say if I have brought specific knowledge from SASAH to it. Since this placement was so different from the academic atmosphere of university learning, it is hard to pinpoint knowledge I have specifically acquired from SASAH to Arts 4 All Kids. When I look back at the skills I relied on, many of them were developed through previous jobs and volunteering with children. Originally I had hoped to be placed in the visual arts group at Arts 4 All Kids, but help was needed elsewhere. So even the other half of my degree (an honours specialization in art history and visual arts) was inapplicable to creative writing. SASAH, however, through all the essay-based courses has improved my writing. In this regard, I am able to use further refined skills to help develop those I taught. It would be hard to prepare for placements like this in the same way one prepares for other courses. I do not know if there is something SASAH can do to improve on this aspect, however, this CEL is about learning in new ways. So having to anticipate and work through problems without a guide is a learning curve, and an important one to be successful in life.

There is value to having a course that engages with the community. As a student, we sometimes forget that there is a world outside of school life. It is important to connect with and engage with your community. Having courses such as this brings awareness about the community and ways in which it can be bettered. As a SASAH student, I think





CELs are beneficial to the development of interdisciplinary learning and cross-cultural experience. Becoming more engaged with the community leads to new knowledge and experience, regardless of the specific placement. Communities, because of immigration and emigration are becoming

more and more diverse. Learning through your community, therefore, gives you a better cross-cultural experience than any language course you can take. They provide a necessary and unique way of learning outside of academia that is engaging and impactful. Aside from its value to SASAH students, it is also an important area of growth on a more personal level. Being involved with the community enables people to learn more about their community and what it has to offer. Many of the benefits can be easily overlooked with the demands of daily life, but it is important to stop and look for other opportunities at present.

One of the things I love about this CEL is that it is a reminder that there is a world out there, outside of Western. This opportunity allowed me to engage in the community that I normally do not interact with, and become more aware of my surroundings. It has proved to be a valuable asset not only to the SASAH program but also to me as an individual. While there was some concern going into it, it is what most people would feel when something entering into something new. It has opened my eyes to new opportunities regarding future careers that I had not seriously thought about and also introduced new questions. Unlike my previous internship, it gave me a sense of pride

seeing the children develop a love for the arts and a connection to people I had not had before.

Abstract

Two years after my internship and a year after completing my CEL with Arts 4 All Kids, I have revisited them through the experiential learning presentation. After so much time passing between my experiences, it was bittersweet looking back, but also challenging to remember all that had happened. In developing my presentations, I relied heavily on my past reflections and summative reports, hoping to spark my memory. Reading through them, I was able to pull certain ideas and important information that would play a key role in my presentation.

Building the presentation itself was an easy task, built mainly off of keywords or phrases and lots of photographic evidence. As these experiences happened to be very visually occupied, I felt it prudent to share that experience also through visual cues. As previously mentioned, much of what I planned on discussing was pulled from my previous reflections on the experience and expanded on during the presentation. What was somewhat troubling was the thought that I might forget something, since so much time has passed between my experiential learning and now. The one thing I wished I had done was complete this task after each of my internship and CEL so the information would be fresh. However, thanks to the work I had documented during these experiences, I was able to piece together my memory with the information.

Presenting itself has always been one of my favourite ways to receive information but my least favourite to do. Thankfully, I knew many in the audience who are all very

supportive and encouraging, which made the experience easier. I initially was worried that I would not have enough information to say and that I would rely too heavily on my notes. It happened that this was the opposite as I had too much information written down and was able to look up a decent amount. What I gathered from reliving my experiences through this presentation was the importance art has in our lives, and the different ways it can take shape. It is important when we are younger to learn to express ourselves in different ways, which is why I was so appreciative of Arts 4 All Kids. It is in the ways that art impacts the way we learn, and our culture. Regardless if I go into a profession that deals with children, there will always be an importance of child development in the arts.

There is always the awkward pause that happens after a presentation, where they ask if there are any questions, and we are greeted with silence. I was almost as nervous about this as I was presenting. Thankfully there seemed to be a genuine interest, which led to a successful question-answer dynamic. Some questions were simple, revolving around my work with children past to present. Another was a little more complex, as he asked about how these experiences have developed skills that can be applied to future experiences, whether with children or without. The things that stood out the most were the development of patience, and the ability to present information in different ways. Be that to teach children with different learning strengths, or among adults in a more formal presentation. Asking these questions forced me to focus on certain aspects of my experiences, reflect, and apply them in different settings.

What I enjoyed most, however, was learning about the different experiences other people in my cohort had. There were a wide variety of projects that had been undertaken

both locally and globally. It was fascinating to hear of the experiences people had across oceans and closer to home in the GTA. What I most appreciate from this is that it gives me other ideas as to what is out there. As a fourth-year student, whose plans are undefined, it is comforting to see different opportunities and areas of work that can be applied to the Arts and Humanities.

Overall my experience with experiential learning and later the presentations was one I am grateful for. It provided life skills and experience that I would not have obtained within a classroom setting. Learning from my own and about others provides me with perspectives and a belief that this can all be applied years down the road.