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Final Report: Iconoclast and London Children's Connection Internships

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Final Report

As my second last semester of undergrad came to an end, so did the third edition of Iconoclast under my co-director ship. Writing this reflection, I was held back by a fear of being proud of myself. What bred this emotion? Was I afraid of coming off as egotistical? Or, was there something in society that promoted an unassuming attitude towards speaking about our accomplishments? I ended my SASAH presentation by encouraging my cohort to list five things they were proud of during their internship experience. I noticed many students, myself included, were concerned with whether we were performing our best that we never took a minute to reflect on the work we have done to get this far. These momentary stresses muddled my values and convinced me I was not doing a good job. Through both internships, I have learned the importance of stepping back from the project to rebuild confidence. This reflection explores both internships with a focus on not shying away from moments of accomplishment. I will remind myself of these accomplishments in any creative or working position in the future.

Iconoclast

Iconoclast is an arts and culture magazine supported by the Arts and Humanities Student Council (AHSC) and SASAH. I joined the team as assistant director in my second year, and have worked for a year-and-a-half as co-director. We worked all year around, from brainstorming themes, to overseeing production, and maintaining a current image on social media. Even when the edition was released, the team continued working to sort out hires and themes for the next

semester. In the next bit of reflection, I am going to explore the accomplishments I am proud of with this edition, (UN)HEARD.

Theme Brainstorm

In the summer of 2020, the unjust murder of George Floyd ignited a cultural revolution. The ongoing systemic racism and injustices in North America are finally being exposed to the public eye, and the BLM movement ignited a drive for education and understanding. There was a moment on social media where everybody posted a black square. This black square intended to redirect attention from other media news to finding ways to educate ourselves and support the BLM movement. A friend in Minnesota called me upset about how this trend (considered ‘slacktivism’) interfered with her friend groups. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, she did not attend the marches, but did her part in supporting protesters. She made lunches, opened up her backyard for water and rest, and cleaned up the garbage on the street after the protest. In no way should any form of aid be compared, but it is disappointing people accused her of not doing anything because they did not see anything on her social media. She was too busy on site to post on her socials! Her friend group accused her for not using her platform to its fullest potential and suggested her silence was equivalent to choosing the side of the oppressor. My conversation with her sparked my own evaluation of how I was handling the situation. I had to take time to educate myself on the topic before I could have a judgement on either my friend or her friend group. I hope that my friends did not think I was choosing the side of the oppressor because I was not posting anything – I did not have a platform on social media that could share information. My biggest platform was Iconoclast, and I hoped it was influential enough to raise awareness to the cause.

Before reaching out to the directors team, I had my hesitations in bringing up the topic. I was scared of having the edition appear to be a tokenization of the issue or a perpetuation of white

guilt. As well, it initiated an internal navigation on where I stood as a half Japanese and half white woman on campus. Yes, I grew up with all of the privileges of someone in a non-marginalized group but still was visibly a minority... was it my story that needed to be told during this edition? Regardless, I approached the Iconoclast directors with the idea. **Proud moment #1:** Everybody on the directors team was open to taking on this theme, focused around the current racial climate. We acknowledged the theme would be more challenging than other themes, as we would have to do our own education and check with people in marginalized groups about the theme and its appropriateness. Once again, we ran into the dilemma of whether it should be the responsibility of the marginalized communities to teach us about their oppression. At the same time, we were looking for a place to start. We reached out to multiple groups across campus, such as the Black Students Association, the directors of SASAH, and a few professors in the French department. We were prepared to have the uncomfortable conversations as a place to start; they were necessary for change, growth, and understanding. I am appreciative of all the groups' patience and understanding of where Iconoclast was coming from.

Another former SASAH student said to me, "the world does not need another pretty magazine right now, it needs unification". Her voice echoes in my head to this day as the final edition of (UN)HEARD is published on the Iconoclast website. Going forward, we debated how we wanted to approach the submission process. We wished to use our space to uplift the voices of those often unheard on campus, without making it seem like we were using their struggles for content. At the same time, we acknowledge that the majority of our following base came from non-marginalized groups. The submission was open to both sharing marginalized stories on campus, and for non-marginalized groups to share how they have grown or where they still have space to grow. We hoped that (UN)HEARD would serve as a first step to education for some, and

a cathartic experience for others. As a co-director, Celine, mentioned in our editors letter, the education does not stop after the last page of the magazine closes.

Iconoclast *Collective*

This semester, we focussed on approaching Iconoclast as more of a team collective. In previous years, I was hesitant to give criticisms to the graphic designers on their spreads, as they were equally a part of the artistic creation. Thankfully, I had a close friend on the graphic designer team who was honest with me. She included aesthetic details that reflected her own understanding of the work. When the directors asked to take it out, it also took away the personal touch to the graphic design spread, which is just as much art as the submission pieces. Leaving the detail in was much more meaningful than taking it out for the overall consistency of the piece. I am glad she spoke up because it made the directors reevaluate our roles with the entirety of the group. As a collective, it is important that everybody's voices be heard, not just the directors. While the edition came together, it only became more appropriate for the theme and graphics to be created as a team. This year, we worked everything out on a Google Doc (that can be edited and shared in real time), a benefit to working remotely. Being in quarantine, we could all access this document anonymously and bounce ideas off each other. For this theme, more than any other, members triple checked details down to vocabulary to create an appropriate theme. **Proud moment #2:** Being part of a team that was willing to put in a little extra work and check each other to make a respectable magazine.

Podcast conversations

This semester, the directors were more involved in podcasts. Working remotely brought more opportunities for the directors to be part of the process. As the podcasts were done as a Zoom

recording, we did not have to organize around Radio Western availability schedules. The director's episode was a casual and transparent conversation with Eesha and on how we came about this theme. The conversation's natural progression explored our own individuality as people in marginalized communities. Three out of the four directors come from east Asian descent, and we had an eye-opening conversation on whether we would categorize ourselves as people of colour. We wondered if the "BIPOC" label was an individual identification or something that society put upon us. We came to the conclusion that the use of BIPOC would be for Black and Indigenous people of color. It did not feel right to group ourselves as an east Asian women under BIPOC, when Black and Indigenous POC have experienced different injustices. **Proud moment #3:** The directors and I, in front of an audience, faced our own fragility with this term and decided that we were not people of color. We acknowledge that we all grew up with the privileges of non-marginalized people. Hopefully, we inspired listeners to ask questions to each other, no matter how foreign or uncomfortable they may be. Even if no one was listening, it was still refreshing and thoughtful to have this conversion between the directors team.

Submissions and working remotely

The publication part of Iconoclast, aside from the theme, came easier than in previous years. This has to do with my confidence in the role (proud moment #4), and working remotely. Usually, the submission process took about seven hours. We met on campus, went through every piece individually, and decided why they would fit with our theme. This year, we added comments throughout the semester on a Google Doc, making the final decision process a matter of majority rules. As mentioned in previous reflections, choosing submissions was always the most challenging part of the process for me. With no formal training in any fine art, it never felt right

for me to accept or dismiss a piece. All I could simply offer was “I like it” or “I don’t really like it”. Art holds deeper creative expressions that I could never understand because I do not know how to look at the pieces. This year proved to be even more of a fragile process. We looked for pieces that were educational and raised awareness, however, I was afraid to dismiss pieces in case I could not understand it as the artist intended. I was happily relieved when every submission fit perfectly to the theme. What was different about the theme compared to others? Were submissions that came in for (UN)HEARD a better quality, or had the directors changed their guidelines for acceptance/ could understand art in general better after doing this process four times in the past?

Non Elitist Vocabulary

As (UN)HEARD focused on highlighting injustices around the world, and especially on Western campus, we also explored how our magazine could do better. As mentioned above, I am pleased that the entire team was a part of the theme brainstorming process. The directors and I embraced a more neutral tone to our language in our theme description, call for submissions, and editors letter. Overall, university can perpetuate ideas of elitism and is already inaccessible to so many people. If our call for submissions was written with long words with the goal of ‘sounding smart’, it could be hard to read and come off as snobby. In this edition, we were conscious of the language in which we used to make submitting more inviting and more accessible. This practice has been transferred to how we write in academia, in general. It may be impressive to use big words and complex sentence structures, but I believe it is even more impressive when we can communicate ideas in a way that anyone could understand, no matter their academic background.

Next semester will be my last edition of Iconoclast. Reflecting on these past two years, I had no idea how much Iconoclast connected me to the greater Western Community and encouraged

me to critically analyze cultural occurrences outside of the academic environment. From an administrative point of view, I will hold these invaluable skills, such as empathy, embracing change, and the power of teamwork in any position I find myself in the future. I would recommend a directorship to anyone looking to improve their interpersonal skills. Whether having creative skills or not, this position allows one to have a creative outlet in the process. Students will get a deeper insight to the talent on Western campus, as well as other people's thought-provoking and comforting ideas in response to global topics.

London Children's Connection

The London Children's Connection (LCC) internship would not have been possible without the help of the third-year SASAH class. One of our assignments required students to create a LinkedIn page, resume, and cover letter. I pretended to apply to the LCC because I had worked at a summer camp for the past four years, and felt I had the prerequisites. I thought, if the cover letter and resume were already made, what would I have to lose if I actually applied? Three days later, I was filling out my availability for training shifts at the LCC.

Transitioning to adulthood

With the LCC, I worked as a supply on-call staff. From 7:30-9:30am or 3:30-5:30pm, a shift supervisor and I created fun and engaging programming. Depending on how many students were a part of after school programming, there was one Kindergarten group and one Grade 1-5 group. I enjoyed the kindergarten age because of how much attention they called for -- I was always busy and entertained! This was more than just passive babysitting as the staff were equally as engaged as we hoped the student were. Engaging in play reminded me of what it was like to be a

child; there was something special about forgetting current life stressors and running around laughing. Between playing and being one of only two adults responsible for up to 30 students, I felt the transition from teenagehood to adulthood. It turns out I am an adult, even though I have been feeling in between teenage-age for so long.

Play

From the start, the interview established the importance of play. We were tasked with creating an afterschool program based on scenarios with other interviewees. I appreciated this tactic because interviews can be intimidating, but integrating play took pressure off. We were given images of scenarios that the interviewees problem-solved together. Having come from no early childhood education background, the only skills I could apply to this exercise were the skills I learned at Camp George. As the youngest in the room, I was hesitant to bring up ideas -- but that was the whole point of the exercise! **Proud moment #5:** I had the skills and experience, although from a different background from others, that could still help the scenario problem solving. There was no reason to be shy. I had to remember there is strength in diversity, and my experience from camp was equally as valuable *because* it was different. Working through the interview process and the rest of my time at the LCC created the transition from student teenager to student adult. Never before had I considered myself to be the adult in the situation. At camp, we had the assistant directors and unit leaders to report to. At the LCC, I reported to my shift leader and occasionally the office administration with new programming ideas. The independence allowed me to follow through with any programming, without doubling back in fear that my programming ideas were not good enough. I should take this confidence and independence with me into any position. Regardless of if I have a supervisor, I will put in my 100% effort, with no fear of not being good enough.

Another detail that started the transition into adulthood and decision making was when kindergarten students would point in my direction and say ‘go ask the grown up!’ I looked behind me to see who they were pointing at. Then I remember, *I* was the grown-up in the situation. I forgot how capable I am and how much I have done up until this point to prove myself as an independent, responsible, and trustworthy adult. For example, I ran successful sail activities for all ages with my team during the last four summers. Referring to myself as an adult in the rest of this reflection even feels weird... I guess we are all kids at heart, in adult bodies with more responsibilities.

One school vs. many

For the first few weeks in the role, I bounced around schools in London. My primary role was to help out the shift leads. The responsibilities ranged from taking attendance, setting up toys, to being prepared in case of emergencies if the shift lead was unavailable. Lucky, I was never put in a position where I had to assume the role of a shift lead for an emergency. If the situation presented itself, I felt confident because of the training sessions from both the LCC and camp. Bouncing between schools had its benefits and downsides. On the one hand, I could learn from different schools and apply their techniques to others. On the other hand, I never had a chance to make a strong rapport with students in two hours.

The overall rule with the LCC was to incorporate 30 minutes of physical activity outside. As this placement started in December, it was difficult to get all the kids excited about going out into the freezing weather (and getting excited ourselves!). Most of the time, students had their own imagination games already set up and did not need much attention during these 30 minutes. There were other schools that opted to play in the gym for their physical activity instead of going outside. For me, going outside was helpful and chunked the shift nicely. Going to the gym required walking

through the school, whereas going outside took another 10 minutes before and after to do washroom breaks and organize our winter gear.

In March, I was placed at the same school every afternoon. Being at one school was relieving as I did not worry about bus schedules and could make a better connection with the staff and students. I was looking forward to the end of my day where I could take a break from everything and play with kindergarten students for a few hours. With the same students and staff, I memorized the schedule and could prepare for a good day. The first few days of my permanent shift, I helped the kindergarten students transition from school to aftercare programming. Their schedule was physical activity outside, immediately after school. Students took a break from the classroom and mentally prepared for aftercare programming. Thinking back on it, helping the students put on boots and hats was not much help, as they were doing it themselves up until that point. After being there for a few weeks, I understood that it would be more helpful if I set up the toys for when we came back inside. This was nothing my supervisor ever asked me to do, but a small detail I noticed that helped coming back inside much easier. Once the 30 minutes were up, the students were so excited to go inside and play with their toys. But, nothing was ready because we were outside playing. It was even more difficult when the students would pull on our clothing to ask for toys while we were busy doing attendance, unzipping jackets, and setting up snacks. Taking three minutes after my initial arrival to set up the toys made the flow from outside to inside snacktime much easier. While my supervisor, Alyssa, helped the lingering kindergarten students with their winter clothing, the others were already immediately immersed in their games. This marks **Proud moment #6**: Taking the initiative to leave the students for three minutes. I fought the fear of leaving Alyssa in case she thought I was avoiding my tasks. Rather, leaving ended up being much more helpful. On my last day, Alyssa let me know how helpful the simple three minute

toy set up was. She said she would integrate that division of roles between assistant and shift supervisor in the future. I noticed interns are so afraid of wanting to do what we think is right as newcomers, but it turns out some of our suggestions are helpful, valuable, and make a positive change for the future.

Reflection on vocabulary

Being around kindergarten students for so long made me reflect on my own childhood. I am sure the same goes for everybody reading this, but I cannot remember much before middle school, unless they are small snippets of memory. We should give six year olds more credit for how observant and adaptable they are. There was one student who was working hard on a rock collection. But, because it was winter, the snow would melt and turn into mud, hiding his rock collection. At the end of programming, he was upset to leave his collection and his mom reassured him that the rocks will be there the next day. Of course, the snow made it impossible to find his rock collection and he was upset with the promise his mother made him. I could guess at that moment, the mom thought, "I'll let him know the rocks will be there tomorrow so we can get into the car and go home faster." I was surprised to see that this little six-year-old remembered that sentence and was looking forward to playing with his rocks the next day. This interaction between the student and his mom made me change how I spoke to the kindergarten students as well. It is easy to make empty promises to get kids to go somewhere faster. In this present moment, adults do not remember these moments we experienced as kids, so we think empty words are okay. After seeing the disappointment on the rock collectors face, I knew those emotions were real and should not be manipulated. Alyssa, in her own interactions with the students, made me aware of the vocabulary that I used. I always admired how she went about problem solving in the classroom. When two crying kids approached me, I took control of the situation and delegated rules for

sharing. In the case with my rock collector, taking control resulted in leaving faster. But, taking a few extra seconds to consider the language might change the situation altogether. Thinking of another way to safely store the rocks around the snow and mud, although might take a few extra minutes, made this student much happier. Alyssa put the onus on the students to problem solve themselves. “How can we keep your rocks safe overnight?” In a fighting situation between two kindergarten students, she would ask “is this a good idea?”, instead of telling the child fighting was a bad idea. She gave the power and independence to the students (as the LCC did for me) to make them aware of the situation. Even though change does not happen overnight, the students took responsibility and understanding of the situation to work on their problem solving skills in the future.

I admired how she used her words around being careful. In a play situation, many words were being thrown around. If a child is always told ‘careful here!’, ‘careful there!’, that word gets diluted in all the other activity going on around them. For example, if a child is on the play structure unsafely, staff are quick to alert them to be careful. With all the other sensory stimulation going on around them, however, calling that one word out might not be the most effective way to problem solve. Instead, Alyssa said “notice how the snow makes the play structure slippery?” With this vocabulary, my supervisor was fostering a sense of awareness for the students. I applied this to the frequent fights over sharing toys. Instead of problem solving for them, I said “do you see how fighting makes your friend upset?” or “is there a way we can use a timer to decide who gets the toy?”. Vocabulary makes a difference in both child and adult relationships. Now, even outside of my work in the kindergarten, I am conscious about how I raise awareness to my own surroundings and my own feelings. Yes, this approach works well in a work environment, appears to be less bossy, and is more focused on teamwork but personally, it helped me validate my emotions. In

general, we get upset over situations we cannot control. But, when I use the language that I use with the children on myself, such as noticing my emotions or seeing how my actions impact others, it makes a difference on how I lead my day-to-day life. I am glad my supervisor was using this language because the students will grow up to be aware and emotionally mature individuals.

Presentation

In past years, the experiential learning presentations happened in person. To abide by COVID-19 restriction rules, the presentations were done over Zoom. I thoroughly enjoyed this process and found it much less intimidating than if it were in person. I still had the connection to professors and students as I would in an in-person presentation, but had the comfort of doing it from my own living room. I wonder how the question and answer process would have differed if we were in person...would more students ask questions? Perhaps in person, it is easier to tell if everyone is paying attention. I am happy that we could still have our presentations, and doing them from home gave a more personal feel.

In past reflections, I focussed on specific incidences that taught me different skills and problem-solving strategies. This reflection was more universal as I explored the applicable skills learned over the entirety of the internships. I would recommend an internship with the LCC because of their flexible hours and something-for-everyone feel of the program. As I was an on-call supply assistant, I could work my availability at the LCC around my lecture and study schedule. The shifts were typically only two hours, and served as a great study break to play with children. All personality types are welcome in the child care setting. It is common to assume that an energetic and bubbly type is necessary. While this may be true, that energy may be intimidating to some students who are more reserved. Having a balance of the quiet, introverted leaders and the energetic leaders makes for a friendlier environment.

I cannot believe my four years of SASAH is coming to an end! I remember these internships being the pinnacle of the degree, and now I am reading over the final reflection. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to get a feel for what it is like to be a working adult in the working world while invaluable life skills along with it.