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Microteaching: The Application of Line in Composition

The aim of the lesson was for students to be able to 'identify and discuss the significance of line work in compositions and their importance in Children's picture books'.

I set out the objectives at the start of the lesson and recapped on my previous microteaching session that focused on the use of line in art. I continued by giving context to the use of line in compositions (that are a key part of creating artwork in picture books), by showing how composition in film can easily be used to explain the concepts of composition across a wider spectrum of artistic disciplines. This presentation took approximately ten minutes to complete before moving on to the developmental portion of the lesson: a task to produce a composition (using the element of line), to try and convey a specific emotion to an audience. For example, how would you portray anger drawing a Monster in a forest? By having recapped on the lines used in the previous session I hoped that the students would be able to use these to their advantage when imagining their concepts.

While they drew their ideas (for a twenty-minute slot), I had conversations with each student to discuss their ideas and to see if my knowledge of the subject could help spur some thoughts of their own awareness; could their own experiences in how they have viewed things be made more clear to them, to help them be more aware of things to notice in the future?

The final part to the session consisted of a fifteen-minute group reflection where they discussed their ideas together and gave feedback before I gave examples of how this process could be used when illustrating children's picture books. The students then completed a feedback form in the remaining five minutes.

I was rather nervous about conducting this lesson unlike my previous one, because I was not as confident in knowing as much information about film as I know about illustration. I completed a BA (Hons) degree in Illustration, but I only had an A-Level in Film Studies (although I have consistently used the information I had learnt throughout my work for the entirety of university). I was aware that one of the students present had prior knowledge about compositions and was afraid of not being as well educated on the subject if asked a question that I didn't know the answer to.

As I began the lesson I gradually began to ease into presenting it and found my way quite quickly, and stopped relying too much on my notes as guidance, however I did occasionally sound robotic when remembering prompts I had written.

While explaining the postulations of compositions, I did feel a general passive response from all students when asking them questions and trying to get them involved. There was a lack of students that day, so I hoped that a smaller group might have been a bit more intimate and involved, but there was sadly a lack of enthusiasm; the amount of information to take in could definitely have been an intimidating factor.

While they were engaging in their practical work the tension seemed to lift and finally dissolved when we spoke as a group because it felt much more relaxed and laid back. I felt confident that I had taught well due to their results showing a good quality of the information that I had exhibited, and the feedback forms gave me a great sense of comfort to see what they enjoyed, and what could be improved on to better their learning experience.

Everyone has the concept of composition embedded in their subconscious just by observing his or her surroundings. Line plays a huge part in it this; 'Leading lines refers to a technique of composition where the viewer of your photos attention is drawn to lines that lead to the main subject of the image' (McKinnell, 2013).

Since this is an art subject, I think that contemporary pedagogies could be easily used within this area. When teaching students Illustration in higher education I think that it is very important to ensure that they complete as much of their work as independently as possible. We provide them with the general knowledge that is already out there about a subject, but it is down to them to decide on how they view something, or how they can provoke new meaning to an audience: 'Contemporary teaching methods is the act of using ideas and philosophies of educators before us and combining it with your own ideas and philosophies to form a new way of teaching the next generation' (Creecy, 2016).

Creecy uses this definition to talk about her view on teaching music, but I think that it greatly refers to any artistic field of study. Indeed there are ways in which we can see things collectively, but each person has a very different response in relation to their personal experiences. Take composition for example; leading lines are known to lead your eye to a specific area of a picture, but that does not mean that we perceive the emotions created within it to be the same as the person standing next to us. By creating a lesson plan that

allowed the students to explore their self-concept, it allowed them to take part in directing their own learning during the main task.

‘Andragogy is a learning theory that is designed to address the particular needs of adults, and it is based on the idea that there are significant differences in learning characteristics between children and adults (Knowles, 1980)’ (Cercone, 2008).

The theory of andragogy and creativity are exceedingly complimentary in all of Knowles’ principles of adult learning.

In relation to Knowles’ ‘Five Assumptions of Adult Learners’ (1968), I tried to write a solid lesson plan that would fit to them.

In regards to ‘*self-concept*’, once the core information was provided to them in my presentation, the students were able to apply it to their drawings. As previously mentioned, any ‘*past learning experience*’ can further boost their work and develop ideas further (this supported the students when discussing their work as a group). In terms of their ‘*readiness to learn*’, since it was a session where they were required to attend, I had to think of ways in which to stimulate their minds to a subject that had a lot of information to absorb (especially so late in the day). Looking back now, I think that I could have included smaller tasks during the presentation or perhaps I should have made a bigger impact at the beginning to heighten anticipation since it may not be an area that they are interested in. ‘Anything that affects physical or psychological comfort such as pain, fatigue, anxiety, or fear can affect a person’s ability and motivation to learn.’ (Patient Education, n.d.). This is probably most relevant to an artistic subject, especially if the people participating are not confident in their ability to undertake practical work like drawing. Being judged on something that they deem themselves as being unskilled at can cause discomfort and a resilience to try their best. That is why I aimed to do a similar task in this session as my first due to the fantastic feedback that I received about it being “non-objective” in regards to the quality of their work, but more focused on the meaning behind what they drew.

‘*Practical reasons to learn*’ is a difficult one to talk about when looking at what I had planned: ‘Adults are looking for practical, problem-centered approaches to learning...’ (Learning Theories, n.d.), with regards to what I planned, there is the element of trying to decide how best to convey the emotion that they were given, but the information that I provided them would have helped them to solve that easily. Granted, I could have spoken less and shown more examples of compositions (such as film clips, or talks with directors about the topic), which would have allowed them to think more about the problem that

they needed to solve. Thinking about it though, we see the conceptualizations of compositions everyday and are imbedded into our subconscious, so their 'past experiences' would have helped them to solve the task just as easily as when I provided them with all of the information that I did.

'Driven by Internal Motivation – While many children are driven by external motivators – such as punishment if they get bad grades or rewards if they get good grades – adults are more internally motivated' (Learning Theories, n.d.).

In some way, if I had made the task more of a group discussion throughout and had asked questions more regularly and had them all involved, maybe there would have been a prominent feeling of involvement and fun to boost their motivation. There were only four students in the class so having a more intimate, close-knit group discussion may have loosened up tension.

Becky H. Patterson states that the 'principles of creativity and andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) are compared and found to be complementary especially in such areas as self-direction, active learning, and preference for the problem centred approach' (1986). I wholeheartedly agree that Andragogy is the soul of teaching art in higher education. It is about discovering new ways in which to see the world, and show the world how you view it. We are taught many artistic concepts as children, and see these implemented unknowingly around us everyday (from line to colour semiotics), 'but while the concepts may seem simple, once mastered they can stretch and grow in all directions, no matter what style of art is being created or appreciated.' (Stewart, 2019)

In contemplation of the cross-cutting enhancement themes that I embedded in the lesson, all were integral in the development portion of the lesson. The students exhibited teamwork when talking about their drawings alongside problem solving and communication, and brainstorming when having to think about the importance of each line used in compositions.

Overall, I think that the session went well. My observer said that I engaged the learners from the start and had a Powerpoint presentation of a high standard. When asking the students for their feedback, the same points cropped up about the task not being clearly explained, the lack of group interaction and my lack in confidence.

Before the lesson began I had expected there to be at least nine students present, (all of which had taken part in my last micro-teach session). I planned for the start to look at a general recap, but the room was filled with silence because only one person present had

attended the previous session, so I encouraged anyone to just take a general guess. From the feedback I had a fantastic suggestion of showing the video that I played to begin with, allowing for the general information to be known by everyone and easily applied into the rest of the presentation.

I do think that I told them a lot of information in a ten minute slot, and since the majority had not seen my previous session about the importance of line in picture books it might have been a bit tricky to grasp all of the concepts thrown at them, especially since I wanted to make sure that I fit the initial assessment into the ten minutes stated on my lesson plan. What I could have done is shown the KQED Art School 'Elements of Art: Line' video first to establish the information that I went over before, give the important bullet point knowledge of composition and then show a scene from a film to see if we could have identified those points.

This could have been much clearer to students to prefer to learn visually, and it would have lessened the pedagogical aspect to make it a more student led, group discussion. This would have helped to support my cross-cutting themes too.

I definitely improved on a few points that I made last time; finishing on time was a main concern of mine and I managed to do it this time around. I did not manage to translate anything on the slide show in to Welsh for any bilingual students, so I will need to remember for next time. However I also wanted to make sure that I had time to connect what I was telling them to picture books, because I think that composition is a huge aid in the design of an image, and more so in picture books.

'Composition is important because it shapes the viewer's experience of the artwork' (Sawyer, n.d.)

I am glad that I was able to finish with a discussion on composition in children's books and I think that it was definitely helpful to show the students how I use this knowledge in my own professional practice. By doing this I am showing it's importance when developing artwork for children.

Jessica Stewart stated in her 2019 article that 'these creative building blocks are essential and having a grasp on how they work is important both for artists and for lovers of art.' She is referring to the seven elements of art, which are taught to us as children and are important factors in a child's early development. Grasping a basic understanding of these

can help a child evolve their comprehension of the world, and I think that the more difficult a concept is to explain, then perhaps the more mature a child's mind might be when observing something. Children are highly inquisitive and should be subject to more difficult artistic concepts rather than be subject to the typical 'ABC' picture books for a few years of their lives. Compositions can create subtle or immense emotions in film, photography and paintings, so why not picture books? And by having a wider range of compositions in them then maybe children can subconsciously obtain a bigger metaphorical understanding of cultural symbols as they grow up.

'Pieces with a symmetrical composition (the same on both sides) tend to feel very calming, while asymmetrical pieces (different on either side) feel more dynamic. One part of the piece might have more going on, or more visual "weight," which draws your eye to that part.' (Sawyer. n.d.)

My Action Plan consists of doing more as a group. I should only tell the students so much before letting them do their own self-led work, however if I discuss topics with them from the beginning then it might lead to a more interesting discussion and be a more comfortable environment. I think that I kept the content fresh and relevant for students to be interested in the work that I provided them with, but maybe by having a film scene play they might have had more opinions to give. I put my own interpretations on them from what I had watched previously, but didn't stop to consider that they might have seen something differently. I would definitely consider making more of an impact at the beginning of my lessons (if relevant) just to heighten the motivation of my students. The one thing I do know is that the students found the subject very intriguing and would recommend it to others. This gives me great confidence to use this subject in relation to others as I think that it has great importance in how we can all see the world.

"Movies touch our hearts and awaken our vision, and change the way we see things. They take us to other places, they open doors and minds. Movies are the memories of our life time, we need to keep them alive."

- Martin Scorsese

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