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Microteaching: An Introduction to the Concepts of Mark Making in Illustration

As a perpetual student of the arts, I am always looking at new ways to see the world through art. During my auto-ethnography for the lesson plan, through the means of articles, websites and in-class discussions, I wanted to focus on the perception of art, mainly the question: can the perception of someone with significantly more life experience be changed via the medium of art?

Through my experience I am aware that different elements come together to create a piece of artwork to provoke an amalgamation of metaphors and to provoke feelings (all of which vary depending on the viewer). There are seven elements of art, and as stated by Jessica Stewart in her 2019 article 'these creative building blocks are essential and having a grasp on how they work is important both for artists and for lovers of art.'

Due to only having thirty minutes to present my lesson, I decided to focus on one of these in order to confidently complete what I set out to do; to see how line can change a person's point of view about a drawing, and to see how the students can use line to represent how they see themselves.

I gathered the small group of seven students that were in attendance on to one table, and began the lesson by giving a seven-minute presentation that displayed the objectives and explained the basics of how line is used in art (from film and animation, and even to photography).

I then applied these findings in to how they could be used in picture books, providing evidence of varying genres that line can be incredibly beneficial for. I made sure to ask questions throughout in order to ensure that the students were not only understanding what I was trying to teach them, but to engage their interest and generate opinions about a topic that they may not have much knowledge about.

Once I had finished the presentation, I set a small beginner task to help ease them into the developmental portion of the lesson. Their job was to draw a line that best suited an emotion that I gave them, for example if I said "angry" then they draw a line that matches how they best visualize the word.

Once drawn, they were asked to reveal their lines to the others and discuss their ideas as a group. This then lead on to an individual task where each student was asked to envisage themselves using the different types of lines that had been discussed in a small video that I had found online to aid them in their ideas. In the KQED Art School's online video, a line is described as '...the path created when an object moves from one point to another'. There are so many different forms that a line can take whether they are '...dashed, dotted, rough, smooth, zigzag, implied...' (KQED Art School, 2014).

'... lines can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal. Straight, curved or freeform... they can be thick or thin, light or dark... sometimes one line can be all of those things.' (KQED Art School, 2014)

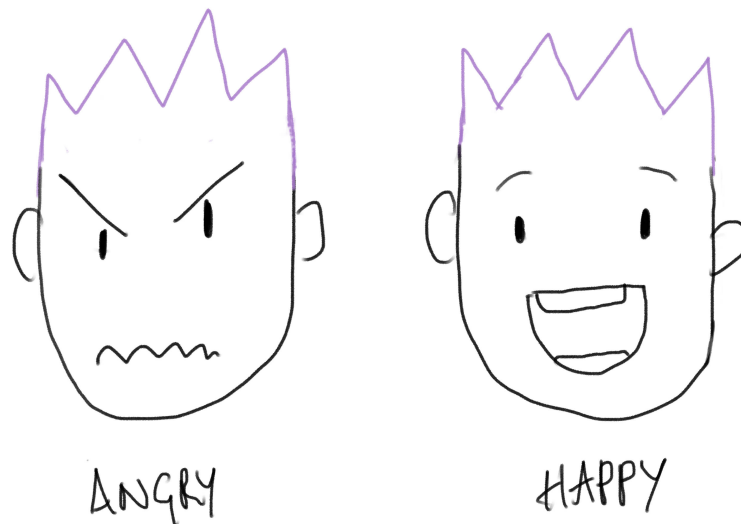
These elements are taught to children as the basic building blocks of art, 'but while the concepts may seem simple, once mastered they can stretch and grow in all directions, no matter what style of art is being created or appreciated.' (Stewart, 2019)

These constituents appear in our day-to-day lives, from the bottles that we drink to the buildings that we visit. My aim by the end of this lesson was to see if affective teaching could change, or not alter their views on varied impressions of art just by changing a line. When teaching children they are at an early stage of development, it is easier to instill this information in them and then take that knowledge to create something new and wonderful and see the world differently. However, when teaching adults in higher education, they already have a lot of life experience that could hinder the group discussions from progressing, as they may have already generated an opinion on the subject years beforehand.

The comfortable flow of conversation was my main concern when conducting my lesson; I was worried that either no one would be able to speak up confidently about what they thought, they would be too stuck in their ways to try and see something in

a new light or everyone would have the same opinion, hence my aim to see if their perception can be changed would have failed miserably.

However, I am happy to say that the experiment worked. Those who spoke up about the images (as seen below) could point out that when two jagged lines were drawn in different contexts (Angry and Happy) the moods of the images greatly changed for them.



Overall I think that the lesson went very well. The students felt a little bit intimidated at the start because they didn't want to be judged on not being able to draw well, but they were reassured when I had created a non-objective lesson plan that only concentrated on the impressions made by line rather than the accuracy of how something looks. They all got stuck into their practical work and it was lovely to see.

I was extremely happy with the outcome of the lesson. Despite many not having any prior knowledge, once one or two spoke up about how they felt others became confident enough to voice their own thoughts.

I liked that the group was small, it allowed for us to have a bit more time to discuss each person's drawing at the end of the lesson, and made for a more harmonious exploration.

I believe that the affective domain is the most effective way to teach and understand art, however I was still unaware of how each student best learnt so I wanted to ensure that all three learning domains of the Bloom's Taxonomy were covered. The use of the presentation established the rudimentary information of line in art, and by asking questions I hoped to encourage their own way of thinking (rather than me dictate the information in a pedagogical fashion); this adhered to the cognitive domain. The developmental section of the lesson was a more kinesthetic based assignment in the hopes of them physically understanding the use of line themselves (and as I mentioned earlier the small group task helped to initiate a tiny beginners guide for their individual work). As Kristen M. Warskow (2014) states 'I feel it is highly important to teach effective planning in art education as it aids in a richer understanding of the creative process.'

The final part of the lesson consisted of feedback regarding their individual pieces and speaking to one another about how they saw themselves. I thoroughly enjoyed this part of the lesson because by this time everyone was curious to know the thoughts behind certain pieces drawn, and gave interesting and insightful feedback. As expressed by Duncan Allan of Tattingstone School to Fred Sedwick in his 1993 book 'The Expressive Arts': 'we're talking about discovery, asking questions, exploration, solving problems... if we get back to what art is, well, the whole purpose of it is a means towards discovery.'

Everyone had differing opinions, but if they were in agreement it wasn't due to the concept of Irving L. Janis' (1972) 'groupthink' term that theorises people setting aside their own opinions to adopt the viewpoint of the rest of the group. I was ecstatic to see the enthusiasm that everyone had and that they were all comfortable enough with one another to say what they thought with no judgement placed on their ideas. Since they had no prior knowledge of the subject, I had hesitantly assumed many would follow one or two who had the courage to speak up. Luckily I was wrong.

I came to the realization of another concern that developed when the discussion began, mainly due to Darren's line-work being a figurative expression of his low self-confidence regarding his weight. He was the first to speak, and despite laughing it off, it was obvious that he was extremely nervous about what the others would say. Luckily they were all a lovely group of people and without hesitation made him feel calm and comforted. It did make me think though that the others may have low self-confidence, and I did wonder how many of them would really be happy speaking up about what they had drawn.

There are areas that I could have improved on, mainly my use of emergent technologies. I used Powerpoint, Preview and an online video link (KQED Art School (2014). *Elements of Art: Line*) but in order to reinforce the "art aspect" of the lesson, I could have used a programme that is used by artists. For example Adobe Illustrator, Procreate, Photoshop (the latter being more likely). If I was to use Photoshop on the monitor to draw different emotions, I would not be as limited as I had been on the whiteboard with one marker pen. Photoshop would have allowed me to illustrate quickly and effectively and also provide me with easy access to hundreds of different styles and sizes of brushes. It also would have allowed students to possibly interact and have a go too (but perhaps thirty minutes wouldn't have been enough time, largely due to the fact that it can take a while to get used to using the programme). Also, by seeing someone who has more experience using the programme, they may either feel excited or too intimidated to use it themselves. Case studies by Francis (1993) looked at the use of technology in art education, wherein he claims that the use of new devices and software could be used "as a vehicle for broader social, historical, and cultural education" (p. 3) in order to provide greater influence and substance to art in education. I know that this refers to all areas of art, however I truly believe that with the continuous development of software illustration is growing stronger, and is probably one of the most prolific disciplines in the world. Having it in education not only teaches students the basic functions of the software, but it also educates them about what their possibilities in the industry are. By limiting myself, I was limiting what I was teaching the students, and this would not have been incredibly beneficial to the next generation of aspiring illustrators.

Casting my mind back to the tech that I used, I think that I tried so hard to include every type of learning style in the hopes of having a more holistic approach to my lesson that I didn't really concentrate on the appearance of my presentation. Although I did accumulate good examples of images to back up my research, all of my writing was in capital letters (which helped me when writing it, but may not have helped the students when reading it). However, as long as the images were coherent, I don't think that the writing really mattered as I verbally provided most of the information, with the most important facts being bullet-pointed simply on the slides. I would also consider doing a bilingual accompaniment to the bullet-points on my slides. I am currently on placement in the BA(Hons) Illustration department of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and I am aware that a few of the students speak both Welsh and English. If I start doing this now, it will be easier to remember to do it when teaching those students, and maybe it will make those who speak Welsh feel more included.

I am glad that I attempted to cover a number of different learning styles because I think that everyone managed to learn something new in their own individual way. I definitely think that each section interconnected well and remained relevant to cover the topic that I was teaching. In DT Willingham's 2005 article "*Ask the Cognitive Scientist*" he asserts that the use of VAK is solely dependent on how the class is taught instead of how each student learns. Although I believe that each individual has a stronger way of learning, I do agree that a lesson focused on art should include a hands-on task, because by practicing techniques themselves they can begin to develop a more practical and cognitive assessment of their work and of art around them, rather than just being told pedagogically.

If I had proclaimed the facts about illustration to them and not gone ahead with the practical session, then I believe that the information would not have stayed in the forefront of their minds for long, but by doing a practical themselves, they were able to see just how different lines can work, especially when it's used to create something personal to them. It makes them think more about the world around them and pushes them to not only take into account the symbolisms that they see in

their everyday lives, but to think outside the box and take those little details and turn into something that represents who they are.

If I was to do this again, I could elaborate on the small group task that we did. I would use an interactive whiteboard, draw one line and ask each student to turn the line into a drawing that represents an emotion that I give them (making sure that the original line is a constant factor throughout). As a group we could then discuss if the line could have been used in a different way or kept the same.

I definitely intend to expand on this subject, (after all there are another six elements of art to talk about), but it would also be interesting to see how I can take line a little bit further and use it in a broader context. If I was to just talk about colour in conjunction with line, the lesson would be very similar, and if I want to think about teaching an entire curriculum in the future then I should start looking at how to build on a small concept. After all I want to challenge myself and make sure that I can create comprehensible lesson plans for students who are looking to illustrate professionally.

Since I was working with a small group of students the task was easy to handle; there were less people to talk over and it was a much more relaxed conversation. I can imagine that with a class of thirty plus students, the discussions may become too loud, as many would be fighting to be heard, or they could take the quieter approach of not saying anything at all due to personal insecurities. Some people in the group that I taught in my microteaching session had already known each other for a while, and everyone was able to loosen up. I think that with a larger group, splitting everyone into smaller groups would be much more effective.

My aim of the lesson was 'to identify and discuss the significance of line work in Children's picture books'. I ran out of time, and lost track of what I was aiming to do with the students by the end of the lesson, concentrating more on lines in general rather than the use of it specifically in picture books. Next time I need to be more aware of my timing, especially if it's a larger sized class that might be more difficult to control.

My aim was to prove that anyone could enjoy art, whether by doing it or exploring it vicariously. The feedback that I received was very heart-warming and gave me confidence in knowing that it is possible to stimulate an interest in something that may never have even crossed their mind. Art is everywhere; we pass by them every day but do not necessarily see them. I think lessons like this can help bring a bigger awareness to the topic in order for people to see everything in a new way. Darren approached me after the lesson and said that he now had the confidence to draw more in his spare time. Kelly enjoyed my passion for the subject and said that she noticed more semiotics when looking at her surroundings.

As quoted in Fred Sedgwick's *'The Expressive Arts'* (1993):

'The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist'
[Ananda Coomaraswamy]

Word Count: 2749

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