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The Impact of Art-making in the University Workplace

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Abstract

Beginning in the summer of 2002, a Queen's University arts education research team has met weekly for art-making sessions. This research paper describes how this long-term art-making practice has influenced the personal and professional lives of the team, based on semi-standardized interviews with six participants and one observer of the art-making group. Several key themes arose from the analysis, including the growth and deepening of relationships amongst participants, the sense of losing track of time while engaged in art-making, and the importance of art-making sessions bringing a temporary reprive from work-related demands. These themes resonate strongly with the scholarly literature and empirical work on embodied knowing, creativity, and non-formal adult learning.

Introduction

The authors of the present paper—two faculty members and two graduate students—work at Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario. We work in the fields of arts education and research, and over several decades, we have been involved in a variety of studies dealing with student growth and teacher transformation through the arts. One of these studies was a particularly large and complex national research project. It was while we were engaged in this national study that we made deliberate changes to our workplace environment in order to better cope with the enormity of the demands of the project. The present study describes how we modified our workplace through regular art-making.

The national study described above took place over a seven-year period. During this time, a Canadian team of over 50 faculty members, school board administrators, and graduate students were involved in studying the effects of the Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) school improvement program, and our university served as the administrative site (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). A core group of four people administered the research protocols and analysed the results: a PhD student, an administrative assistant, and two faculty members. There was also a changing cast of undergraduate and graduate students involved with data entry and analysis, so that the working group at Queen's was generally comprised of six to eight people, including the core group.

With 12,000 students, 1,000 teachers, 100 artists, and 80 principals involved in the research study, keeping track of the data was daunting. Part-way through the project, some of us realized we no longer had time for our own art-making: paradoxically, we had drifted away from the very thing that brought us to arts education research and practice in the first place. And so, beginning in the summer of 2002, all of the Queen's-based people involved in the research began to meet for a two-hour art-making session every Wednesday morning. Over the past five years, we have explored a variety of paint media including watercolours, acrylics, and encaustics, as well as several forms of mixed media and collage. We have created mirrors and candlestick holders from 19th century architectural salvage. The most recent experiments have involved fused glass. The national research project is over; the art-making continues.

On the eve of our sixth year of making art together, it seemed important to examine how our art-making evolved and what mechanisms served to make the workplace art-making enterprise continue over many years. We undertook the present study to identify reasons for the longevity of the initiative and to ascertain how our art-making has influenced both our personal and professional lives.

In the following section, we examine both conceptual and empirical literature that relates to art-making in the workplace. Four broad categories are considered: (a) caring and intimate space, (b) arts and creativity, (c) adult transformation theory, and (d) non-formal lifelong learning.

Literature

Caring and Intimate Space

People who have been called to be educators are often known for their caring and nurturing qualities—nurturing the students they teach, caring for the disciplines they pursue (Banner & Cannon, 1997; Hare, 1993). But caring for oneself is often neglected. Nel Noddings (1992) makes the argument that, "considering how important our bodies are to us, it is surprising how little attention they get in schools" (p. 74). So, too, she claims, are other aspects of self neglected in schools—those related to spiritual, occupational, and recreational needs. The same can be said for academic life. Many of us eat on the run, exercise sporadically, and rarely, if ever, have time to attend to our artistic or spiritual needs. The art-making we describe in this paper is a form of caring for the spiritual, occupational, and recreational aspects of our lives—not as an "add-on", but as a structural component of our academic routines.

Noddings (1992) also speaks about the need to care for one's inner circle, that is, nurturing relationships with "intimate others and associates" (p. 91). Noddings emphasizes that such caring also provides important opportunities for "intellectual engagement and the acquisition of cultural knowledge" (p. 109). In caring for ourselves, we do not cut off intellectual engagement: we foster it.

The literature also supports the claim that the forms of caring described by Noddings are more likely to occur when people in relationship with one another are able to interact in a form of intimate space. By intimate space we mean not only physical space, but also the relationship between individuals, which involves the trusting of others with multiple facets of oneself. This means that creative environments give people opportunities to make connections and experience a sense of belonging. Myers (2003) defines four types of spaces: public, social, personal and intimate space. He claims the development of culture and relationships with others occur in all four types of the spaces. He states that, "Public belonging is a space where we need numerous significant relationships in order to experience a sense of healthy belonging and community. We need to develop more connections in this space than in any of the other three" (p. 41). This resonates with Putman's (2000) theory of social reciprocity. In his sobering book, *Bowling Alone,* Putnam observes that while the number of people involved in recreational bowling has increased over a twenty-year period, the number of people bowling in leagues has

dramatically decreased. Instead of bowling in leagues—complete with social interactions and connections—people are now bowling alone. Through the metaphor of bowling alone, he examines the vital role that social connections play in engendering a sense of safety within a community of learners, where each member of the community draws from the others, ultimately offering possibilities for a collaborative approach to creativity.

Arts and Creativity

Multiple and sometimes conflicting definitions abound for the role of creativity in arts learning. Some scholars and educators advocate for the importance of creativity in the maintenance and development of culture, some for the stimulation of economic growth, and others identify creativity as central to learning in all disciplines. While these aims differ, there is general agreement in the literature that creative capacity can be enhanced. Several research studies describe the importance of creativity and its benefits (Abra, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Eysenck, 1996; Gardner, 1982, Sternberg & Lubert, 1999; Ward, Smith & Vaid, 1997).

The work of Dewulf and Baillie (1999) suggests that every human possesses creative potential, but that in order for that potential to be realized, creative capacity must be nurtured and developed. According to Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000), variation is a key element to creativity. Variations in experience can help create the kinds of diversity and challenges needed for people to more fully develop their creativity and imagination. In our context, variation in activities and membership in the art-making circle were both present. As Dewey (1954) so aptly stated, "The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness" (p. 184). Arguably, taking part in regular art-making activities has the potential to break through routines and conventions in the workplace as well.

Adult Transformation Theory

Jack Mezirow's (1991, 1996) conception of the process of transformation is based on his research on adult change, which shows that adult learning is a complex and multi-staged process, in which beliefs and actions stem from new personal experiences. The creation of meaning occurs over an extended period of time as learners are empowered to construct more fulfilling lives. The goal of transformative learning is for the adult to arrive at "a more inclusive, discriminatory, and integrative perspective" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 167). The experiences of the art group participants have this integrative perspective.

According to Mezirow, it often takes a powerful catalyst to prompt an adult to engage in the "partial dissolution of identity required by the transformative learning process" (Patteson, 2004, p. 12). Mezirow calls this catalyst a disorienting dilemma. Other researchers have recognized the complexities involved in describing such disorienting

dilemmas. Cranton (2000) suggests that disorienting dilemmas present "discrepancies between learners' beliefs, values, or assumptions and new knowledge, understanding, information, or insights" (p. 188). It is after encountering such a dilemma that the adult is plunged into a new meaning-making process. In her doctoral work on teacher transformation through art-making, Patteson (2004) demonstrated that art-making itself can serve as a disorienting dilemma, particularly if the art-making is sustained over an extended period and gives participants the opportunity to "sink deeply into an activity, and into new kinds of relationships with themselves, their colleagues, their students, and the physical world" (p. i). The art-making sessions engaged in by the LTTA research team encompassed these qualities.

Non-formal Lifelong Learning

There is a growing body of empirical work on non-formal learning environments for adult learners. Much of this work appears in the workplace learning literature, where researchers examine how employees learn skills and strategies associated with the workplace (Fuller & Unwin, 2005). Studies on workplace learning indicate that successful learning occurs when there is good instruction and modeling, when the instruction is integrated directly into the workplace setting, when the employers are supportive, and when there is effective peer support and mentoring (Zepke & Leach, 2006). While these features were present in the art-making group as well, and may account for the long-term successful learning of group members, the art-making group was not a workplace learning setting *per se*. That is, while the setting was decidedly the workplace and the participants were all members of the same research group, the content of the learning—the skills and strategies gained by the participants in the visual arts—was not directly related to their work as students, support staff, or faculty members.

The ways in which the participants interacted are more closely aligned, perhaps, with non-formal learning groups that pursue similar content to the art-making group, but outside of the workplace context. In what they describe as personal interest learning, Zepke and Leach (2006) explore how non-formal learning occurs in voluntary groups that meet in order to achieve a set of desired learning objectives. They cite the work of Stalker (2003), in which a group of women met informally over an extended period to enhance their abilities in working with the fabric crafts. Taking part in this group created a sense of community amongst the women, gave voice to an undertaking typically associated with women's work and craft, involved both technical and social learning, and had therapeutic benefits for some members of the collective (Zepke & Leach, 2006). Zepke and Leach also noted that this kind of informal group is facilitated in a democratic way, and that leadership typically moves around in the group. New members are easily integrated into the culture of the group, and the activities and nature of the group naturally evolve and adapt when new members join. These features were all present in

the art-making group as well: new members brought different interests and expertise in the arts and activities and foci were adjusted accordingly.

Zepke and Leach (2006) also note that learners in non-formal programs rarely aspire to formal qualifications, which results in different expectations than those associated with formal programs. Because of the lack of formal qualifications or assessments, learner outcomes are positively influenced by peer tutoring, mentoring, a sense of feeling safe, and a learning environment that is flexible, learner-centred, and involves dialogue and interacting with the arts—drama, music, crafts, and visual arts.

Non-formal learning pursuits are often highly embodied as well. Zepke and Leach (2006) have identified the role that drama, music, crafts, and visual arts play in personal learning interests, whether those interests are pursued individually or in a group. Other non-formal learning almost always involves the body (Upitis, 2003; Sumara & Upitis, 2004). But as Powell (2007) argues:

> Our predilection for theories of teaching and learning that treat the mind and body as discrete entities ignores the ways in which mind is always embodied through interanimation with the world, in which eye, hands, ears, and nose enable us to make meaning—embodied knowledge in which body-mind dualism becomes bodymind unity. (p. 1083)

Powell goes on to observe that it is in the arts that the body has always been a "place and space of reasoning, knowing, performing, and learning" (2007, p. 1083). This is in keeping with the observations made by Upitis (2003) where she notes the supremacy of embodied learning not only in the arts, but in pursuits related to sports and the natural world as well. Further, she observes that most of the important learning that adults undertake—learning that they choose to pursue in non-formal environments—is rarely encountered through formal schooling. Upitis (2003) writes:

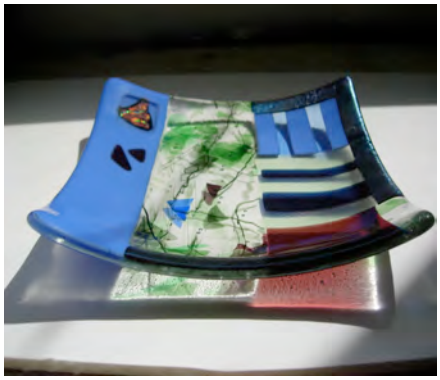
> I have had many occasions to ask groups of adults assembled at conference presentations or in professional workshops to think about the following set of questions. First, I ask them to think of something that they love to do—a hobby or a passion, something that they might teach others about, something that they continue to learn about in a variety of ways, no matter how hard the struggle. Once a particular pursuit has been brought to mind, I ask if that pursuit is something that is associated with the arts, the body, or the natural world. Nearly everyone indicates that the pursuits that intrigue them as adult learners are, indeed, somehow related to the arts, the body, or the natural world—the very things that Dewey identified (particularly if the notion of "making things" is extended to the physical activities of sport and recreation). When I then ask members of the group to raise their hands if the thing they identified was something that they learned about at school, very few people respond in the

> affirmative. Why are the things that intrigue us most in our adult lives not amongst the subjects and activities that we encountered in all of those years of schooling? (p. 60)

Research Goals

Some researchers have attempted to create models of non-formal and formal learning settings so that the benefits of non-formal learning might serve as lessons for teachers and students involved in more traditional or formal settings. The research reported in this paper was undertaken, in part, to further this aim. Another purpose for the present research is to ascertain whether the issues of caring and intimate space, creativity, adult transformation, and embodied learning were articulated by members of the art-making group as central features for this sustained non-formal workplace arts education practice.

Method



This is a qualitative study of seven participants associated with the art-making group. Four participants have been regularly attending the art-making sessions since their inception in 2002. These four members also formed the core administrative group for the national study described at the outset of this paper. Of these four, two were faculty members, one was a graduate student, and the other an administrative assistant. The fifth participant was a visiting graduate student from Brazil. The sixth participant was a graduate student from Queen's who participated in the group from 2006 through to 2007. The final participant—and the only male in the study—was a bystander of the group at its inception but did not participate regularly in art-making.

The 16 graduate students who participated in the art-making group throughout the five years ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their mid-fifties. The three who were interviewed also reflected this demographic. The adminstrative assistant was in her late thirties at the time that the study took place. One faculty member was in her forties, the other in her fifties. Of the six participants who were regular art-makers, one considered herself a visual artist. This graduate student was the only member of the group with extensive formal training in the visual arts. Other members of the group had taken part in arts workshops and other less-formalized forms of training in the visual arts. Several of the members had extensive training in music.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for five out of the seven participants by a graduate student who was an occasional member of the group and therefore had sufficient familiarity with the setting and group members to conduct the interviews. Two of the participants responded to the interview questions in written form. The live interviews were audio-taped and were thirty to forty-five minutes in length, and these interviews were transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

The interviews were based on a semi-standardized interview guide. There were questions regarding participants' views of themselves as artists, their experiences with various media, their views on how their relationships with members of the group evolved over time, and the extent to which the art-making sessions influenced their professional work and personal lives.

The study was cleared through the General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University. All participants consented to have their names, photos, and art work appear in this research paper. Photos were taken of participants during the process of making art as well as of participants' art products.

We begin our discussion by providing a description of the art-making sessions, as depicted through the artifacts and through a poetic representation of the sessions. This is followed by the findings of the interview data. In our analysis of the interviews, we began by identifying central themes that were salient for the participants. We used ATLAS.ti (1997) to assist in the sorting, coding, organization, and analysis of the interview data. Two researchers coded each interview using an open-coding technique. Researchers resolved, through discussion, any differences that arose in the coding or in the interpretation of the data. Some codes that were established during analysis were: losing sense of time, team-work, humour, personal transformation, professional benefits, and art outside art-making sessions. The process of coding allowed us to systematically identify corroborating and dissenting themes amongst participants, and to relate the results to the literature described previously. Themes that became apparent once initial coding of the data was complete included: personal and professional benefits, "leveling out" amongst group members, and art-making as an embodied process.

As we reflected on the process of data analyses, we found that taking part in the art-making sessions contributed to our ability to analyze the data in a collaborative manner.

Wasser and Bressler (1996) identify the notion of "interpretive zone" when analysing the collaborative process amongst researchers. That is, researchers "bring together their different kinds of knowledge, experience, and beliefs to forge new meanings through the process of joint inquiry in which they are engaged" (Wasser & Bresler, 1996, p. 13). Not only had we developed strong working relationships through the national study and the art-making sessions, there was a shared and rich context for analysing the interview data.

Setting

Art-making Sessions

Each week, on Wednesdays from about 10 in the morning until noon, members of the art-making group gathered in the kitchen of the Stone House. The Stone House is a Queen's University building, a short walk from the main building of the Faculty of Education. It contains several offices and seminar rooms, and at the time of writing, housed large research projects and community development projects such as reading programs for at-risk children and youth.

On Wednesday mornings, tea is brewed, milk is poured, and participants find a place to work. Sometimes participants work individually on an art project and sometimes they work with the same materials. As is often the case with non-formal adult learning groups, there is no permanently identified leader or teacher for the group. However, often one of the members comes to the Stone House with an art idea for the rest of the group to try.

As noted previously, only one member of the group—one of the graduate students who was part of the core group for the national research study—considers herself to be a visual artist. Other members of the group acknowledge their ability to recognize and work well with colour and form, but do not consider themselves artists. When pushed to consider why they do not consider themselves artists, the self-identified non-artists all pointed to a lack of formal training. However, all participants of this group are willing to try new things, work with a variety of media, and share their ideas willingly during the art-making sessions.

The group has worked with the following media over the six-year period: acrylics, watercolours, wood, beeswax, collage, fused glass, tin, encaustic, and marbling. Some of the artifacts produced have included: acrylic and watercolour paintings, lamps, painted chairs, tin planter boxes, wood and metal ornaments, encaustic on canvas, twig furniture, large murals, wood-framed mirrors, and stationery. Since 2002, over 25 people have been involved in the group on a regular or intermittent basis, of whom six were interviewed for the present study. On most art-making days, four to eight people are present.

When we first presented the results of this research at the National Arts and Learning Symposium held in Ottawa in May, 2007, we described the setting and our art work through a poem for two voices, which appears below. The column on the left was read by Rena Upitis; the column on the right, by Katharine Smithrim, the two core faculty members of the group. This is a form of poetry we first encountered through the work of Paul Fleischman (1988). The visual format of the poem dictates the performance. Performers read lines as printed, in turn or together, and sometimes read different words at the same time. We reproduce it here for several reasons, not the least of which is that we do not wish to lose sight of artistry in representing our research. Indeed, Rusted (2000) makes the plea that:

> An attempt should be made to represent rich aesthetic meanings in a way that diminishes (at least some) of the researcher's interpretation, letting the reader in to make an interpretation and relying less on the researcher as connoisseur. The challenge is in seeking ways to continue to favour the aesthetic experience, whether it is the experience of the producers or the interpreter/reader. (p. 115)

What follows is an attempt to let the reader(s) in to make just such interpretations.

Yellow Kitchen

How we spend our days is

of course

how we spend our lives.[1]

Jane

Janice

Jordana

Jennifer

[1] Annie Dillard (1974).

Ann
Rena
Katharine

Rebecca
Susan
Christine

Betty-ann

On Wednesday mornings we paint

Autumn 2002

Drops of Cobalt Yellow

Alizarin Crimson disasters
With a pinch of salt for starlight

John drifts into the kitchen

We copy each other

We copy each other

Winter 2005

We copy Martha

Ann
Rena
Katharine

Amanda
Stephanie
Eileen

Martha

Betty-ann

On Wednesday mornings we paint

Autumn 2002

Streaks of Payne's Grey and
Rose Madder washes

With a pinch of salt for starlight

Makes coffee for us

We copy each other

Winter 2005

We copy Martha's chair

We copy Miro, too

Bird in the Night 1968

Seated Woman 1938

Woman in Front of the Sun 1950
The Gold of the Azure 1967

Winter 2003

jigsaw
reciprocating saw
Japanese hand saw
Cordless drill
And driver
Hammers
Hammers
Hammers

Winter 2003

jigsaw
reciprocating saw
Japanese hand saw
Cordless drill
and driver
Hammers
Hammers

Sawdust flies

100 year old door trim

salvaged

Brittle

Dry

Layers of flaking paint

Nestling into the grooves
New life
as a mirror frame

New life

Spring 2004

Beeswax bubbling in the
Sunbeam electric frying pan

Sweet
Intoxicating

Spring 2004

$2 at the Sally Ann
Sweet
Intoxicating

brim
Beeswax tinted Phalo Blue

We are punch drunk
On beeswax

May 2nd, 2007

In the yellow kitchen

It's Wednesday morning

Tea steeps
Sliced poppy seed lemon cake

Open

Spring smells

Kitchen
Studio

Copper flashing
Cedar fence rails

Wire cutters
Lamp sockets

Campbell's soup cans filled to the

Hooker's Green
Burnt Umber

We are punch drunk
On beeswax

May 2nd, 2007

In the old Stone House
It's Wednesday morning

Kettle boils

No nuts

Double hung windows

Wide

Breeze into our kitchen
Studio
Kitchen

Black sharpies
Half-painted Miro chairs

Wallack's Lamp Black acrylic

Mouse droppings in
The silverware drawer

With the bent knives

And spoons
permanently purple

How we spend our days

is, of course

How we spend

our lives.

Interview Findings

Several themes emerged from the data regarding the perceived benefits of the weekly art-making, some of which are represented in the poem that appears above. The strongest responses were about the growth and deepening of relationships amongst the participants. The professional and personal benefits of art-making were also significant. The transcendent nature of art-making, and the learning involved in art-making were other strong themes.

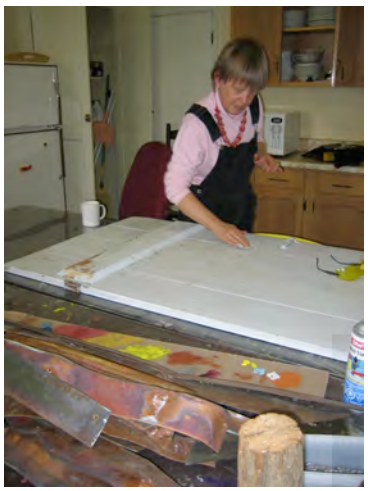
Relationships Amongst the Team

Participants spoke about the sense of community in the group, how working together promoted trust, how well we grew to know one another, about the bonds that formed in the research team, how we gained more insight into people and what they were really like, and how we saw beauty in our colleagues through art-making that we did not see in other environments. We came to know each other better because we "bumped up against

other people's frustration levels" and "we saw each other in that role of being a creative person."

Indeed, several participants spoke of how art-making created a levelling out amongst the professors, the graduate students, and the staff. One of the professors commented, "We're all on the same level in that group. I think that it is easier for the professors to feel that than the students, but it was a true community of equals." A graduate student explained, "What it brought out to me was a recognition of how different we all were on the team. Our ways of working in the world were reflected in the way we worked on our art. It really brought to the forefront why we are a team. We had an underlying passion for the arts but we have such complementary skills that are all needed." When reflecting on the relationships formed in the group, one graduate student said, "when we're making art in the kitchen, the hierarchy dissolves into friendship". However, two of the graduate students also commented that while there was a lack of hierarchy in the art-making group, more traditional roles of supervisor and student, or professor and research assistant, were still in place when the group was involved in the more standard activities of the academy.

Another form of "levelling out" was associated with the informal leadership of the group. While Rena spearheaded the initial formation of the group, and often led the activities in the first year or two, after several years had passed it was common for the teaching to be shared. One graduate student often took leadership of the sessions, as did an undergraduate student who was involved with the group for a few years (not one of the participants in the present study). The administrative assistant also led activities regularly, and there were also times when there was no leader, but the group simply engaged in their own art-making in this communal setting.



A final form of "levelling out" that we identified occurred in terms of our perceived art-making abilities. As mentioned earlier, all but one of the participants who were interviewed were reluctant to describe themselves as artists, even though several had shown their work in public

galleries and had sold some of their pieces. Even those members of the group who reluctantly wore the label "artist" claimed that the works they produced on Wednesday mornings were not to be considered "art." We have pondered the genesis of this reluctance to label our work as "art" or ourselves as "artists," especially when outsiders to the group are quick to use those labels. Perhaps the reluctance comes, in part, from our collective emphasis on and valuing of the process undertaken by the art-making group. Perhaps it simply comes from the cultural weight of the terms "art" and "artist."

Professional and Personal Benefits of Art-Making

Everyone interviewed made statements regarding the personal and professional benefits they recognised in the art-making. One person commented, "I can't remember what it was like before the art-making group. I know that it brought colour, and imagination, and real possibility into my work world", and "I didn't realize how therapeutic it would be until I started doing it." In fact, several group members regard the art-making as personally therapeutic. One member commented, "Painting is the active art-making that I need desperately." Rena, who started the group, said she had not anticipated all the professional benefits ". . . and all the relationships . . . It started with selfish motives. It started with "I feel awful, I'm going to paint," and now, a lot of us find that we paint when we need to. We use the art-making as a form of coming back to our core."

One of the therapeutic aspects of art-making mentioned by almost everyone was laughter. Laughter and story telling marked the two-hour art-making sessions. A male colleague who had an office in the Stone House recalled, "There was a lot of laughing. . . people were enjoying what they were doing. And creativity. In this particular group I saw a bunch of motivated, energetic women who had a lot of fun." Members of the group made similar comments: "It really helped our team members share a lot of laughter," "We learned how much we all like to laugh," and "Laughter comes easily on Wednesday mornings and we really have time to share our ideas and thoughts and feelings."

Participants took energy, enthusisam, and boldness from the artwork. Some related the effects of the artwork directly to their academic work. Rena said, "We tend to think that all our learning happens in our brains. [Art-making] enhances all the work, inluding the supposed cognitive work where people are literally reading and writing papers. They see things differently after being involved in art-making." Katharine explained that what she learned about her students through art-making guided her supervision of their work: "It's what I see in their artwork that I don't see in other places. I see it with people I've supervised. I think I know where to push them now and I might not have know that if I hadn't made art with them." One of the graduate students reported, "I think that it has enhanced my professional life—it has helped me think about the thesis process and ask questions to other members about their thesis experiences."

For Katharine, the art-making was a significant factor in enabling her to stay working within academia. She explained it like this:

> The companionship, the honesty of the people, the friendships. Reminding me that I'm not like all the other academics. The companionship reminds me that we need other perspectives, we need other forms of work in the academy.

The Materials and the Body

One of the features of art-making identified in the literature review is that art-making is essentially an embodied process. Participants in the research were aware of this in two ways. First, several commented on the importance of the materials—the qualities that the materials possessed, the visceral and sensual responses that the materials invoked. Several mentions were made about the almost intoxicating smell of the beeswax used in the encaustic paintings. Martha, the graduate student from Brazil noted, "My eyes are also delighted with all the colored tins of wax, the brushes, the pieces in all sizes and formats of colored paper lying on the table."

The second way that art-making is embodied is, of course, in the act of making itself. Rena commented, "The hallmark of the arts is that the product is a physical product. You cannot make art without being really aware of yourself and your body." Several participants noted that, in contrast to many other aspects of university life, involvement in art-making brought them closer in touch with their physical beings, which in turn strengthened their intellectual and emotional engagement in the academy.

Art as Transcendent

A sense of timelessness and flow accompanied our art-making. Every week someone would say something to the effect, "It can't be 11:30 *already*." One day, one of the members of the group needed to leave early to pick up her children from the caregiver. She was fully 45 minutes late before she realized that she had forgotten to collect her children, and flew out of the kitchen in a laughing panic.

Members of the group spoke about the transcendent qualities of art-making, how it had a calming influence, and how it helped members to deal with the stresses that they faced in their professional lives. Janice, our administrative assistant once commented, "Even my husband knows that it's a relaxing thing for me. And when I'm feeling tense, he'll say: "You need to paint.'" And Jordana reported, "Oh—and it's very relaxing. I feel a sense of calm when I'm involved in creating something—except when Rena's sawing away at some logs or a door!"

Learning in the Arts

One of the obvious benefits of our art-making was our own learning in the visual and handwork arts. Some participants began to work on their own at home in media experienced at the Stone House. We learned by imitation, by experience and simply by watching. Rena spoke of imitation: "There's lots of imitation and group sharing. And we are really comfortable with copying. It's part of the banter and shared knowledge." The administrative assistant spoke about watching in this way:

> There's one [graduate student] in our group who is an artist. And she did this whole technique. I just watched. And I was watching what she was doing on her canvas. . . I never would have done what she did to get the colour in the end but it was gorgeous. Normally, I think, "I'm going to paint this green and I paint it green." I don't mix colours. I'd like to learn more about that.

Katharine said this about learning by watching: "I was so delighted that people had the expertise. And I could watch them work. Some days I wouldn't even do anything. I would just watch other people. I learned a lot from them."

One event serves to illustrate all the themes suggested above. Martha, the doctoral student from Brazil who spent a year at Queen's, related:

> I remember once when I went to the Stone House I was very sad because I received the news that one of my friends had died. I was feeling empty inside myself, I didn't know what to do, no inspiration at all. Then Rena suggested me to take a chair and just sand it. Then I spent maybe two hours sanding the chair. In the next week I started to paint the chair and I liked very much what I created there. . . And the chair I left at the Stone House. It's like a part of me that I left there with them.

One of the features that is illustrated by Martha's chair is that of the importance of repetetiveness in the rhythm of our daily lives, which is also a feature of embodied learning and one of the earlier themes already identified. As MacEachren (2005) noted, preparing and using the materials associated with craft-making often requires repetitive motions. She noted that this repetitiveness might be considered tedious, "but it can also be an opportunity to "soften" the busy-i-ness of the mind so the unconscious feels free to wander. Repetitive movements offer a way for the rhythm of the material touched to inform the human body of the pace at which life should operate" (p. 28).

There is more to the story of Martha's chairs. Rena continued the story in this way:

> That's how the chairs started. With Martha. Because she came in one day and I said, "Here's a chair. Why don't you paint it?" And she spent two hours sanding that chair. She was so upset when she came in that day and she couldn't paint. She found her way out of that and made a chair, and that was the beginning of the Miro series. We do a lot of imitation. You can trace the genesis of how things happen. Somebody has a great idea and we all imitate it. And we make fun of that, but it's a huge part of the learning process. And I know that chair thing started with Martha's chair, and then Katharine seeing Miro in it [Martha's painted chair]. The three of us all did Miro chairs. And many Miro chairs followed.

At one point, Katharine's husband suggested that we hang two of our Miro chairs on the wall ("Miro, Miro on the wall"). We all laughed again.

Our chairs—and other products—also serve to remind us of the art-making that has transpired over the years. One of the students interviewed for this research has graduated and is now living in another city. When she read a version of this paper in draft form, she wrote in response:

> Is there a place to mention how our art products last and continue to remind us about certain art-making sessions and the journey that we took to make each product? Or how now my Miro chairs have travelled with me to Toronto and two of them are in my classroom, so that every day I can be reminded of our Wednesday mornings? Or how my students ask me about the chairs? How I catch them tracing with their fingers the outlines of the forms painted on the chairs?

There is a place, indeed.

Conclusions

Although we anticipated many of the results, based on our informal discussions over the years, from watching one another taking part in the group, and from the related literature, we were nevertheless surprised by the very strong emphasis participants placed on the relational and team building aspects of the art-making. This emphasis brought to mind Dissanayake's (2000) theories of art and art-making. Dissanayake described the four fundamental human drives as (a) belonging to a social group; (b) finding and making meaning; (c) gaining a sense of competence through making; and (d) elaborating meanings as a way of acknowledging their importance. In art-making, Dissanayake suggests, these four drives come together as co-created rhythmic experiences that express our shared meaning making. Our art-making group, as seen through Dissanayake's framework, co-created rhythmic experiences that expressed shared meaning making. Art-

making enriched the meaning in our research, in our relationships, in our personal and professional lives, and in our art work. Gregory Bateson (2000) claimed that, "in order to think new thoughts or to say new things, we have to break up all our ready-made ideas and shuffle the pieces" (p. 16). Art-making allowed us to do this, both literally and metaphorically. The shuffling of pieces, imitation of others' work, and our developing skills with various media contributed to the fundamental drive identified by Dissanayake about gaining a feeling of competence through creation.

Joseph Myers (2003)—along with others cited earlier—also emphasized the importance of community in public institutions and spaces, claiming, "public belonging is a space where we need numerous significant relationships in order to experience a sense of healthy belonging and community" (p. 41). Numerous significant relationships have brought health to our internal research community.

In September of 2007, due to a re-organization of university space, we lost the art studio of the Stone House kitchen. This loss has not prevented the group from making art together. Although the location, day of the week and some group members have changed since the inception of the art-making group, the sessions remain a strong and positive experience for us. We do not foresee anything that would prevent us from our weekly art-making sessions in the future: making art collectively is integral to our professional and personal rhythms.

As quoted in the poem for two voices, Annie Dillard (1974) said, "How we spend our days, is, of course, how we spend our lives." We spend a good part of our Wednesdays making art, and art-making in the academy—our workplace—has changed our lives for the better. Over the years, this has been a substantial commitment of time and dedicated effort. Indeed, it is an unusual amount of time to devote to such an enterprise in an academic setting. But the benefits have also been substantial. By bringing artistic sensibilities to a world of meetings, thesis deadlines, e-mail, papers, and ethics reviews, we have found ways of focusing our attention on creation, relationships, and beauty.

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