



Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

Lesson Example 7.1 Intertextuality

Subject: Art

Level: High School

Country: United States

Pamela taught a high school art class to study and interpret what at the time was a recently released music video by Madonna called *Bedtime Story*. She chose it because it was then current, and it was and part of her students' teen culture yet rich in its evocations. It included references to fine art in ways that were both oblique and intriguing. To help the students explore the numerous associations the video evoked, Pamela introduced her students to intertextual thinking with the aid of the computer program StorySpace. Utilizing this program, students developed a whole hypertext to keep track of all the connections they found. The program allows numerous files to be inserted and linked by the maker, and, in turn, for viewers to make their own links. Potentially, every time the hypertext is viewed the sequence by which a viewer navigates it will be different so that the associations a viewer makes between one file and another will be different.

The video's style is surrealistic, with many images of transposed facial features, dramatic and both contradictory settings, and lyrics that challenge logic. For example, it begins in a futuristic laboratory with Madonna dressed in a strapless silver garment and posed lying with arms and legs splayed out as if on an examination table. She sighs and moans in apparent ecstasy or pain – it is unclear which – as an intravenous cylinder begins to drip a thick, clear liquid into a tube attached to her arm. The music begins, and with each heartbeat we are invited to travel on a dream-like journey through a kaleidoscope of unexplained scenes that are reinforced by the lyric line 'leaving logic and reason'. Madonna's hair colour changes several times, she sings through her eyes, skeletons appear, dances swirl about, and two large wounds appear on a woman's back.

Pamela's instructions were simple. Students had to create at least three connections which could be either existing connections or new ones; that is, emanating from the video or between connections. The connections only needed to be personally significant and easily understood. In constructing their hypertext, the students could download stills from the video, song lyrics, their own personal comments, and short video clips.

Somewhat confounded by the video, the students explored a wide variety of ideas that the video had evoked for them. They sought information about Madonna herself; influences of art on music videos generally and *Bedtime Story* in particular; the music video industry, including its history; music video techniques; and how music videos had been critiqued by critics.

One student researched connections between the whirling dances in the video and Sufi dervishes. Another student canvassed the idea that Madonna was being punished for being a powerful, rich, single female, while another student explored special effects and makeup. Still another student made connections to a popular music band. Several students felt that the video had either directly or indirectly referenced artists, and they followed up with research on the artists Rene Magritte, Gustave Klimt, David Smith, and Joan Miro.



Typical of the unpredictability of intertextual thinking and hypertextual construction, one student followed the connections to Frida Kahlo 1946 painting *Tree of Hope* which shows a woman's back with stitches. Seeing disturbing similarities between the wounds in the back of female figures, and linking the word *back*, he was lead to Man Ray's 1924 image *Violon d'Ingres*, and, in turn, its connection to Ingres's painting *Grande Odalisque* from 1814. He linked them to Madonna's performance at the 1991 Oscars where she referenced Marylyn Monroe proactively turning her back to the audience. This student was thus able to demonstrate the use of a trope used over time and in different places, a trope that both reveals and conceals.

Pamela stresses that not all the connections the students made were necessarily valid. Nevertheless, she valued learning along with the students, making connections as they were, and, in the process, able to guide. She felt that while much of the motivation for the activity was derived from its popular culture source, much was also due to the hypertext that students developed. Both Pamela and her students were able to see, literally, the connections being made in real time. Reading and looking at the hypertext as it developed from individual contributions was unlike any previous learning experience. Students added to the hypertextual web, rewrote, and kept on developing until time ran out.

Pamela admits that opportunities were missed. For example, she could have asked questions that problematized some of the imagery, thus asking her students to go beyond exploring links to making critical judgments. Do some images reinforce women's oppression? Does the video privilege one group over another? What is Madonna saying about the artists she has borrowed from? The students undertook the activity as she had instructed them; make connections, but in hindsight she might also have asked them to be more reflective. This would have no doubt added many more links.

Taylor, P. G. (2000). Madonna and Hypertext: Liberatory Learning in Art Education', *Studies in Art Education*, 41 (4): 376-389.



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Lesson Example 7.2 Teaching as Rhizomatic

Subject: Media Education

Level: High School

Country: United States

Over nine weeks on Saturday mornings, Brad, then a doctoral student, designed and facilitated a Digital Arts Workshop for fifteen local teenagers who were interested in a space to explore their own interests in on-line visual culture. The workshop was held in a computer lab at a local, midwestern university.

Brad had no intention of teaching about rhizomes or rhizomatic thinking, and he did not do so, but the experience turned out to be so rich that he came to liken it to a rhizome. Each class is characterized by any number of connection constantly emerging and interacting between a variety of sources, human and electronic. Brad negotiated between himself and each of the participants, facilitated, but also observed interactions between participant and participant as well as between learning face-to-face and learning on line. Issues of private versus public, and resourced and unresourced.

The idea for the workshop emerged from two major concerns. First, the fact that so many youngsters were now exploring much of the lives, as both consumers and creators on-line; and secondly, the desire to create a safe space and provide resources for such teenagers to tinker, experiment, and explore ideas of their own and with peers. In short, this was not to be a conventional classroom, but a semi-structured space, often called a 'third space', different from the structured space of school as well as different from the completely unstructured space of entirely independent learning. For this reason, Brad preferred to think of the young people who regularly attended as workshop participants rather than as students. While he attempted to recruit youngsters from all backgrounds, those who enrolled seemed to share the comforts of free time on a Saturday, access to transport, and enough familiarity with high-tech gadgets and computers to come to the workshop invested in the topic of digital imagery. The students appeared, for the most part, to have a strong on-line network, and already to possess some level of skill - though this varied a great deal - and widely varied interests. For one particularly skilled and resourced student, the value of the workshop appeared, not so much in anything it had to offer by the way of knowledge or skill, but, rather, as the opportunity to interact with similarly interested peers.

Many of the students demonstrated an interest in digital illustration, using on-line platforms like *DeviantArt* to create and share their work. Others enjoyed exploring the virtual worlds of *Minecraft* and other sandbox-style games that facilitated and build worlds through open-ended play. Many participants used smartphone and tablet-based applications like Snapchat and Instagram to capture original images, and they experimented with digital collage platforms like *Polyvore*. Other students decided to take on ambitious and ongoing self-initiated learning goals that combined traditional art-making skills; for example, one student sketched skin designs for characters in *League of Legends* (a multiplayer video game) using pencil and paper before attempting to digitize them for in-game use. At other times, the workshop participants simply discussed their favorite cartoons and new gaming equipment, or shared interesting links and videos. Though largely



unstructured and unguided, these discussions allowed the opportunity to share, in a common space, the visual culture that participants found compelling.

To provide some degree of structure to what was otherwise largely instructed, Brad presented each week what he called “tricks.” These were intended as suggestion for a daily activity for those who were interested, but they also allowed participants to choose to work on something self-directed.

For the most part, students worked independently, relying on Brad and their peers for help when necessary though also to act as audience. For example, one participant used a live streaming service to observe her friend working on digital illustration. She mentioned that she admired the work of a friend of hers viewing her as a mentor to learn from. As her friend drew on her computer, the workshop participant watched a real-time video stream of her friend’s process. Simultaneously, they chatted with one another through another messaging service. The workshop participant explained that a major part of her learning to draw had been by watching friends like this and using their processes as a model, whether online or in person.

Another participant guided Brad through the virtual environment of *Roblox*, a sandbox-style exploratory game. Because Brad knew much less about the game than the participant, this appeared as a transformative moment. This typically reserved teenager seemed to enjoy the way the pedagogical tables had been turned. Although they were seated only a few feet apart from one another, this interaction happened in the digital realm.

It also became evident that major tensions existed between some of these students’ digital visual culture worlds and their complex social lives. This was clear in one student’s *DeviantArt* gallery, where her autobiographical, digital illustrations showed a great deal of emotional honesty. She had depicted complicated aspects of her teenage life including at-home conflicts with her parents about her desire to get a controversial “fauxhawk” hairstyle, and instances of sexual harassment by co-workers at her fast-food job. Her *DeviantArt* gallery was like the private journals or notebooks used by teens of an earlier generation, with the major difference being that hers was voluntarily opened to the world. Being public, her on-line gallery was more than a static notebook or journal that documented her inner thoughts; it was better described as a dynamic and transactional space for her to exercise her talents and express her voice to whomever was interested. And yet this was complicated. She explained that, while her parents were supportive of her ‘artwork’, she had not given them the address to access her *DeviantArt* profile. She saw the profile not as opened to the world, but rather something that she used to communicate with friends and make connections to others who might feel the same way as she did.

The third space of the workshop appeared to offer participants the opportunity to learn through a hybrid of formal and informal learning behaviors. Much was spontaneous and surprising. For Brad, his experiences in the third space were chaotic, messy, and tangled, so much so that he considered it in terms of the rhizomatic model of complexity and emergence.

Olson, B., (2016). ‘Tensions in the Third Space: Examining the Digital Visual Culture of Teenagers.’ *Visual Arts Research*, 42 (1): 8-21.