Critical and Reflective Statement

My current praxis is the synthesis of three distinct elements: my pedagogical practice as a teacher and curriculum manager, my physical "making" arts practice, and my interaction with the theories of arts learning from the Revisiting Practice Unit.

My arts practice has been limited in recent years as my career has advanced, but has centered around decoration, illustration and making. My intention on joining the MA Arts and Learning (MAAL) was to revive a more thoughtful "fine art" practice

Arts research as a defined academic activity came about with the academisation of arts colleges and the sublimation of the arts into the established academic structure, including the PhD where teaching needs to be supported by research activities (Sullivan 2006). I was struck by how it was not possible to identify many examples of *actual* arts research, rather, examples that resulted in dialogue and new thinking about what arts research *could be* (Barone 2006). There is a lack of consensus in the literature around the definition of arts research, and ideas about what arts research can be and is, are still part of the academic PhD research process themselves. Sullivan (2006) identified several different modes of art research, but all are within arts education or use it as their subject, this has led to arts research tending towards using art to present research rather than actually being a critical enquiry (Fox 2001 in Sullivan 2006) or a genuinely new way of modeling meaning (Barrett 2010).

I have used my painting and illustration practice to develop and interrogate my understating of pedagogical theories. While they may appear a "presentation", the making process has enabled me to understand the theories and place them within a structure where I can manipulate and reflect on them visually and in terms of formal elements and material values.

DeDuve (2013) presents a sequential model of arts education. From: talent-metier-imitation to creativity-medium-invention to attitude-practice-deconstruction. Houghton (2017) identifies DeDuves moves between model of arts education as "ruptures", suggesting this is a fragmentation into different areas, rather than separate elements of one thing. If these are separate stages to a process Aitkinson (2006) then refutes the need for the initial stages in the education of a contemporary fine artist and a need to "change the subject" (pg 24) and rethink the need for visual instruction. Conversely Willer (2019) is dismayed by this "attitudinizing taking full precedence over practice" (pg 11), believing that "the attempt to turn art students in to universal intellectuals left them embarrassing amateurs in everything, especially that which had previously been understood as art" (pg 21)

From my practice visually reflecting on these theories it seems to me that these skills are cumulative, rather than separate, sequential or hierarchical stages. Arts education builds a set of skills, all as interrelated to each other as the layers of Maslow's pyramid of needs (McLeod 2020). Providing the skills needed for developing as an artist, or as a creative, or indeed as a person. Harker Martin (2016) likens the early Metier / Imitation stage to a child learning the ABCs, the basics are fundamental to enabling the more sophisticated use of those initial building blocks of arts learning. Art as a literacy, and like literacy in reading and writing, the mechanics must be initially taught, but once the basic skills are in place they can be expanded on, as well as used to support the learning and understating of other subjects. Bob and Roberta Smith identify Art alongside Maths and Design As "Leonardo Subjects"(Smith 2019) areas of

learning that will support all future lifelong learning and living, enabling such skills as awareness, vision, persistence, self-realization and expression (Johnston and Lane 2019) and demonstrated in the projects outlined by Adams et all (2008)

Within the current post-Gove education system in the UK (Birill 2014) we begin well with teaching practical and idea skills together at primary school in immersive and thematic projects across the curriculum. They are then separated out at secondary school and they are discrete from each other and from the rest of the curriculum. Not only does a learner not have the tools of arts available in the understanding of other areas of the curriculum, they are limited in their understanding of art as a subject. Although Eisner (2000) suggests the time might be close when the use of arts throughout the curriculum is possible, this separation can currently only be amended if a learner chooses to progress to a foundation course. However, progress onto Higher Education (HE) separates out by subject, separates the making and the ideas. Often leaving Fine Art learners with few making skills to express their ideas with. (Willer 2019)

Due to our current governments education policies, it is likely to prove difficult to action this move in focus in mainstream education policy and curriculum, but some have suggested it may be possible outside of the testing environment. Indeed, the APPG group report Creative Health (2017) gives no end of examples of benefit to society gleaned from both arts practice and education outside of formal schooling curriculum. Schlemmer (2017) suggests these extracurricular activities might even be an opportunity to demonstrate their effectiveness and ultimately provide evidence for actions that will reduce "the distance between school-based activity and genuine education" (Barone 2006)

This understanding of the theories around arts research and pedagogy has developed using illustration, visual / spatial notes and infographics in my studies. My practice has developed in tandem to this, using these methods and addressing the same themes and developing understanding. The piece reflects the work of Bob and Roberta Smith and W.E.B DuBois' early examples of infographics in its aesthetic. Its concern with colour, shape and composition references formalist / formal element arts instruction, while it also suggests modernist symbolism and interpretation in its audiences decoding of the language used.

While its conventional presentation may suggest a lack of sophistication, the lack of editing in content and presentation in a frame is intended, the lack of glass enables close inspection by an audience, potentially finding information within the amorphous detail not apparent in the initial glance.

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