**OB2 Peer Observation Report**

Session to be observed: Box Making Workshop (3.3.23)

Size of student group: 7 students mixed years and courses

Type of activity: Box-making Workshop

Observer: Dr John O’Reilly Observee: Tilly de Verteuil

“Tacit knowledge is the knowledge gained through experience which usually remains unspoken or unarticulated,” write Susan Orr and Alison Shreeve (2017), referring to Michael Polanyi’s concept of invisible knowings. Observing a peer offers the opportunity to notice those practices that have been well-designed, and notice those embodied practices we don’t register, what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu might call habitus. In art and design school, teachers who have professional practices bring many ways of knowing, being, and doing into the classroom. The following notes are a response to the request for info from the teacher and they highlight the variety of *pedagogic* practices used in the classroom.

**Observations, suggestions, and questions**

The light from large windows running the length of the room highlight the ‘weight’ of the space: big heavy wooden tables, drawers; large blocks for resting on books; chunky, white sinks for cleaning glue off brushes. There is music floating in the background. Tilly would tell me later that she creates playlists with rhythms and pacings, whose affect relaxes, sometimes hurries up, depending on the kind of making which she wants to cultivate in the room at any one moment.

**[Practices #Pedagogy of space-making]**

Tilly asks people to take the box and rest a book weight above it. The item instructions are clear and direct. Students clean sticks in the sink brushes. They are so focused and intent on their process. Tilly is very authoritative. “While the glue is drying what you can do is sand the edges. We won’t do it here [laughs] you can get really obsessive.” Tilly performs sanding the glue off, “Only do it if you need to.”

The next step in the process is covering the book with book cloth, explaining the purpose of this material. She has provided them with cloth pre-cut to size and the box-makers equivalent of an IKEA diagram-brochure – but unlike the IKEA versions it makes sense. This carefully designed brochure breaks down the processes, materials, and movements into simple steps. Like a graphic novel it is also a sequence of images of time, of the future, as Tilly acts as a conduit for the act of imagination where students envision the embodied processes of making. Her pedagogy intimates this embodied process in the way she performs the process, here movements and gestures create, and fill, an imaginary space that exists alongside the space she is actually making in. In this way there are two performances in her pedagogy; the procedural; the bodying. She is articulating for the students in her performance, two different practices, epistemologies (ways of knowing).

**[Practices #Pedagogy of the imagination]**

She performs the act of cutting and folding the cloth, in which there is a complex geometric imagination involved in visualizing how a 2D cut plays out in the volume of the box. Tilly demonstrates two methods for this cutting – using the box itself, then using a ruler.

She notes that in the process they will be using a cutting station and a gluing and asks the students if they know why there are theses two spaces? “it’s so we don’t get glue on the covers” says the student.

Along with the cutting and folding, there is also a process of applying pressure to the cloth, with fingers and nails. During the whole of her demonstration, she checks in with students to see if they are staying with her. There are a lot of techniques being shared by Tilly and she asks, “Is this too much info?” Throughout her demonstration, she checks in with students to see if they are staying with her. They are all happy with the pace of learning, she then shows the easiest and safest way to sue the blade.

**[Practices #Checking-in]**

“Here is the next cut,” instructions are clear, and the voice is firm – while my own teaching is frequently elucidating ambiguity and complexity. I can really see the value in how Tilly communicates assertiveness and decisiveness in a making process in order to enable complexity. It made me think of this affective part of what she does as a ‘pedagogy-of-contagion.’ The tasks require decision and precision in cutting, gluing, and folding.

The students get back to work and Tilly puts on her playlist. The students work at different speeds. She strolls around the classroom, stepping in to help a student not sure about the consistency of the glue. She keeps a discreet eye as she walks around, gathering the book weights. “If you’re not sure about the cut, check with me first and I’ll double-check.”

She announces, ‘Step three in the booklet’ then demonstrates the technique of pinching the edges of the cloth and box, and of ‘cutting comfortably’. It is interesting how comfortable is one measure of using the blade safely. She then shows the technique of glue application. “If there is too much glue on the brush, start in the middle. When I feel the brush has control, it’s not slipping, I slide it quickly over the edge. Do you guys feel confident?” They nod and return to making at the workstations.

**[Practices #Embodied pedagogy]**

**Summary:**

You pull together so many practices in your teaching Tilly: from the design and sequencing of the brochures; to the preparation, cutting and arrangement of materials for the students; to the performative demonstration. It reminded me that the teaching in the classroom is already made up of different ‘temporalities’ (times): the pre-visualisation in the brochures; the gathering of materials and devices for the students, whose sense will emerge in the practice; the movement and gestures where teaching is very-much time-based performance; the solitude in the making that is attended to by the sound you curate. You curate so many pedagogical touchpoints and vectors of learning. It is a very immersive experience you create and I suspect some of that pedagogic sensibility comes from your life as a puppeteer. Though I know you thought there was, or might be attention drop-off I didn’t sense that at all. This box-making was a complex, intense task, that called for mental and physical dextrousness. The clarity of your direction was augmented by the atmosphere of the space you created. What struck this viewer (other observers would see different things) was how the success of teaching event (the demonstration) was a result of everything you created before, around, and ‘after’ it. By ‘after’ it I mean the image of the future you perform for them, and how they imagine themselves in the making the box. I am suggesting a couple of readings just because they may be relevant and an interesting read. Thank you for sharing this practice with me.

Dixon, M. & Senior, K. (2011) ‘Appearing pedagogy: from embodied learning and teaching to embodied pedagogy’, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*

Pallasmaa, J. (2014) ‘Space, Place, and Atmosphere: Peripheral Perception in Existential Experience’, in Borch, C (ed.), *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture.* De Gruyter.

Rowsell, J & Shillitoe, M 2019, ‘The Craftivists: Pushing for Affective, Materially Informed Pedagogy’, British Journal of Educational Technology, vol. 50, no. 4

**Reflection on the observer’s comments and ideas to follow up:**

Thank you for your kind words and thoughtful observations about my teaching practice. I am glad that you found the experience immersive and engaging, and that you appreciated the various touchpoints and vectors of learning that I curated for my students.

Indeed, my background as a puppeteer has likely influenced my approach to teaching, as I often think about how to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment that involves multiple senses and modes of expression. I believe that learning is a holistic experience that involves not just the mind, but also the body and imagination, and I try to create a space that fosters all of these aspects of learning.

I appreciate your insights about the different temporalities involved in teaching, and how each aspect of the process contributes to the overall success of the learning experience. I agree that the preparatory work that goes into creating the hand out, gathering materials, and curating the sound and atmosphere of the space is just as important as the actual performance of the demonstration.

Each step along the way helps to set the stage for the learning that will take place, and contributes to the students' sense of engagement and investment in the task, as well as my engagement with them. I'm glad to hear that my direction, use of language and gestures during the process were clear, and resonated with you, conveying the importance of embodied knowledge in learning.

I am also happy to learn that the atmosphere I create helps to enhance the learning experience.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with my teaching and for your recommendations on further reading - I'm always looking for ways to improve and deepen my practice, so I'll definitely take those into consideration.