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Digital Process and Product: Engaging the Next Generation of Art Education Researchers

Stephanie A. Baer
Miami University, USA

Stephanie Danker
Miami University, USA

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Abstract

As art teacher educators, we want our students to be passionate, informed advocates for art education and capable of conducting action research as artist/teacher/researchers. Students are constantly in the process of understanding what it means to teach with and through the arts. In our art education program, we work to exemplify this complex process through a curricular structure built around encouraging a new generation of art teachers to conduct thoughtful, digitally relevant research centered on improving the field of art education through examination of their own context and understanding. We describe this process here through specific projects and processes, aligned throughout an art teacher education program and how it leads to a final product with the digital teaching portfolio. Connections are made to the action research cycle and a/r/tographic processes that

encourage advocacy and professionalism within an evolving, digitally relevant, process-product experience for pre-service art teachers.

Introduction

As art teacher educators, we want our students to be passionate, informed advocates for art education with the desire to continually reach forward to new ideas and capable of conducting action research as artist/teacher/researchers. Students are constantly in the process of understanding what it means to teach with and through the arts, and who they are as a teacher of the arts. In our art education program, we work to exemplify this complex process through a curricular structure built around encouraging a new generation of art teachers to conduct thoughtful, digitally relevant research centered on improving the field of art education through examination of their own context and understanding. The product of such a process manifests itself here in the creation of a digital portfolio. In the co-construction of this curricular process/product, guiding questions were:

- How can an art education program be structured to guide students toward being action researchers, considering the viewpoints of artist, teacher, and researcher?
- How can an art education program highlight the importance of continued process/product and scaffold that understanding within digital media?
- How can a teacher portfolio serve as an evolving product of artist/researcher/teacher self?
- What could result if that teaching portfolio was allowed to evolve over the course of four to five years on a digital platform, shifting and changing with the author's developing teaching identity?

We strived to address these questions and address them immediately. Students graduate each semester and enter an eternally evolving field, proving critical that we create programmatic structure around the encouragement of thoughtful, reflective, creative digital portfolios. This structure has permeated every class in the art education program influencing curriculum content and delivery, encouraging scholarship, and empowering a paradigm shift for how students might see themselves as capable, reflective, tech-savvy art educators. We describe this process and structure here through specific projects and processes, aligned throughout our art teacher education program and how it leads to a final product with the digital teaching portfolio. We make connections to the action research cycle and a/r/tographic processes that encourage advocacy and professionalism within an evolving, digitally relevant, process-product experience for pre-service art teachers. Throughout the paper, we provide links to further illustrate the processes and products that guide the program and the collaboration that enables it to continue.

Situated in Process: The Context

Our program, situated within a Midwestern university art department, consists of two full-time faculty and approximately 45 students. Students take six art education-specific courses prior to student teaching, along with their liberal arts foundation courses, teacher education courses, art studio, and art history courses. The art education courses are designed to begin their freshman year and occur sequentially throughout their program. The art education program and its facilities underwent significant curricular and structural changes recently including a movement toward technology use in and outside the art methods classroom. This involved the incorporation of a digital teaching portfolio that begins with the first art education course (typically freshman year) and is completed in student teaching (senior year). We also infused various technologies, digital methods, and classroom practices that facilitate and encourage research thinking and invite students to engage in practices that mimic the action research cycle.

The tools and methodologies used to inform pre-service students' process and production must consider the digital nature of today's communication. The use of digital tools and methodologies specifically with pre-service students is not a new phenomenon and has proved useful and challenging for various reasons. The benefits of the inclusion of current technologies in the pre-service curriculum include increased confidence in information and communication technology (Guo, Dobson, & Petrina, 2008), richer data for teacher educators and researchers (Ng & Nicholas, 2015), greater opportunity for critical thinking, and greater accessibility (Mudaly, Pithouse-Morgan, van Laren, Singh, & Mitchell, 2015) to name a few. Mudaly et. al. (2015) also mention that digital media use can be "cheap, convenient, collaborative, and creative" (p. 23). Preservice teachers often have difficulty moving from traditional writing processes to digital formats; "to participate in digital authoring, teachers need the time, space, and dispositions to risk, create, and reflect" (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013, p. 508). Oakley, Pegrum and Johnston (2014) describe the importance of faculty buy-in alongside students for full participation and benefit of digital portfolios and asserted the need for transparency with students about the purpose of the portfolio. Reports that tended to focus more on the challenges of using digital technologies did not suggest a move away from them, but rather greater support and better implementation as a solution.

This paper describes a curricular approach to weaving together digital methodologies with student-generated research navigating the process/product experience of becoming an art educator. We begin with looking through two relevant methodological lenses: action research and a/r/tography. Then, we discuss the evolving product of the digital portfolio, followed by a look at curricular migration towards digital possibilities. Then, following a look at the program more holistically, we describe processes/products from each course exemplifying digital practice and research thinking. The digital portfolio serves as a continuing example

throughout the explanations as an evolving artist/researcher/teacher self and showcases how digital methodologies provide an approach to teaching our students to be action researchers, guiding them towards the creation and ongoing practice of being passionate, informed art teacher researchers.

Providing a Lens: Action Research and A/r/tography

The Lens of Action Research

According to Noffke (1997), action research bridges the traditional theory-practice, knowledge-action gap. The three aims of action research include: staff development, improved school practice, and modification and elaboration of teaching and learning theories (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). The spiral nature of action research consists of observing, reflecting and acting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Stringer, 1996). The learning process in our classrooms is conducted in a spiral fashion. Students observe their experiences, reflect on what could be different, and actively engage in creating teaching/learning products to elicit change in their classrooms. Additionally, a goal of action research is to assist teachers in becoming self-reflective researchers, able and willing to critically and systematically examine their own practice (Stenhouse, 1975). Opportunities are created in the art methods classroom for process-oriented experiences that encourage research-based practices and thoughtful consideration of production. Pre-service art teachers, like researchers, consider their views, ask questions, collect data, analyze their work and surroundings, and reform their findings into new and more complex questions.

The Lens of A/r/tography

The product of our students' extended and supported time as student researchers, the teaching portfolio, can be scholarship of an evolving teacher-self and field they understand more comprehensively and passionately. A/r/tography provides a foundation for understanding how this creative process between self and the roles of artist, researcher, teacher, are co-constructed and wrought with complexity (Irwin, 2004; Pente, 2004). Winters, Belliveau, and Sherritt (2009) describe a/r/tographic process as constantly in flux saying, "In a/r/tography, process matters. This is because meaning is alive-always moving, always growing" (p. 8). Being in-between the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher then provides fertile ground upon which to construct new understandings of what it means to engage creatively in process and continually redefine oneself as a teacher with and through the arts. La Jevic and Springgay (2008) assert, "A/r/tographers live research" (p. 71) and often begin from a familiar place working to construct meaning rather than simply interpret others' understanding of the world. Students manipulate, experiment, and reinvent themselves in real time using unique digital tools that are essential to their future as professionals in the classroom.

An Evolving Product: The Digital Portfolio

Process must come before and weave throughout a product, however, here we would like to reveal the endgame first. We do not put forward a notion of a process/product divide, but rather subscribe to how a/r/tographers delve into the in-between spaces between artist, researcher, and teacher to better understand and create meaning for a holistic artist/teacher/researcher-self. The scholarship most pertinent to pre-service art teachers, aside from learning their field, is the development of their voice and place in the field of art education. A primary place to develop a more holistic voice for themselves is in their teaching portfolios. In the past, these portfolios were often comprised of printouts and page protectors in dusty binders. This important set of artifacts should not be left out of the conversation concerning digital immigration in art education. This critical step in the teacher training experience is not only crucial in how we usher forth new generations of art teachers, but also how we teach students to reflect and engage with current issues in their field. Surely if we, as teacher educators, want to send forth passionate, caring, engaged, and self-aware art educators from our post secondary classrooms, we must include the development of quality portfolios in our curriculum. But it can't stop there.

Creating a teaching portfolio can be an arduous task for a student, especially if it is left until they have an abundance of artifacts from their entire teacher education program to pore over. Sifting through paperwork, looking at artwork, taking photographs, choosing what lessons to showcase, and deciding on a final structure for the portfolio is a daunting endeavor for someone on the verge of applying for a teaching job. Embracing a digital format for the portfolio and providing consistent support in its use, can create openings for pre-service students to play with and develop their ideas alongside the creation of a final product that can be used for the job search (Garis, 2007; Whitworth, Deering, Hardy & Jones, 2011; Willis & Wilkie, 2009). Some examples of our students' digital portfolios are provided below.

Example 1 | Example 2 | Example 3 | Example 4

The nature of these examples is evolving. They are finished and yet unfinished. The students are navigating their way through their artist/researcher/teacher identities and exploring how the visual and public presence of their work online can be continually adapted to fit them. Their continued work and care is needed to fully realize digital portfolios as reflective, practical, and professional tools.

Getting There: Scaffolding The Digital Within Curriculum

In order to address the questions above and prepare students to create effective portfolios, we as teacher educators needed to become action researchers and a/r/tographers ourselves. Entering into a collaborative search for a shared vision of pre-service art education, we

restructured our program to exemplify the complex process we wanted students to experience. We began by making observations of what was currently happening in the classroom and what our students' responses were to both the content and the mode of instruction and production. Much of what we encountered failed to align with digital advances pre-service students would experience in current K-12 classrooms. We began to ask questions about what might facilitate greater engagement and deeper reflection through piloting various projects and digital processes and tools. Our forming pedagogy needed to serve as an example for how we encouraged students to digitally enter into the action research cycle as artists/researchers/teachers.

As faculty, we continually learn from one another, plotting new pathways for students to create connections from one course to another with content and instructional approaches. We wanted students to live with ideas longer than a semester and found ways to co-create extended experiences where ideas would surface and resurface throughout their time with us, generating new scholars responsible for their own meaning-making. Highlighting Carter, Beare, Belliveau, and Irwin's (2011) features of a/r/tography as pedagogy, we provided opportunities for students to encounter the complexity of how both teacher educators and students engage aspects of self and other, in and in-between, student and teacher, participant and researcher.

Our curricular design necessitated a scaffolded approach where each course introduces, practices, or displays mastery of various digital tools, processes, and products. Throughout the program we worked to infuse digital means of communication and creation through the following programmatic components:

- Mobile, multi-platform advising
- Collaborative writing/editing via Google and other platforms
- Digitally communicating with current practitioners, alumni in and outside of class
- Using mobile devices and other digital tools in and for the classroom
- Shared responsibility of program documentation for showcase, fieldwork, and recruitment
- Updating our physical facilities to highlight current digital methodologies

Each program feature required consistent attention and maintenance, but allowed us to centralize the message sent to students about the importance of the digital nature of professional education and research. Similar to how the digital portfolio is an evolving product central in the students' process, we created a digital portfolio of the program to enfold and weave together the complex web of information, resources, and curriculum of

the art education program. The site evolves as the program does, inviting in new content and more refined digital structures. It is a visual manifestation of our shared vision that continues to show our students our commitment to them, the program, and each other as colleagues interested in the future of art education.

What follows is an example assignment or project from each course in the art education sequence that exemplifies the action research cycle and/or a/r/tographic practice in the form of a digital process or product. The descriptions also build upon themselves to illustrate our focus on curriculum alignment, collaboration, and scaffolding learning. Links are provided within the descriptions to pre-service student work and programmatic examples of the assignments and projects.

Course 1: Introduction to Art Education

As the first course in sequence for art education majors, this course was also open to students across the university interested in fulfilling a creative arts requirement towards graduation. Students created a teaching website and added content throughout the semester. They posted assignments on their websites and begin to develop their online presence. Work was created and self-published online to demonstrate competencies, but also to benefit other educators (pre-service and in-service). As part of the Resource page on their website, students curated a page of teacher blogs and museum education links and described why the sites they chose could be useful in the classroom. Students wrote their first lesson plan in this course, created digitally. Students partnered on their lesson and collaborated in a Google Doc, which they shared with the instructor. Editing and accountability within the partner group became much less onerous through use of this technology.

The "Collaboration + Character = Change" assignment in this introductory course infused technology and combined exploration of students' artist/researcher/teacher selves. Students worked with a partner to create a digital stop motion animation based on a social justice issue to advocate or create awareness. They each developed a character in artistic and written forms. Then, together they researched their issue and wrote a script appropriate for their audience. They constructed a storyboard for planning their animation and created a 2-3 minute animation. Afterwards, they wrote an artist statement, promoted their video through social media and reflected on the process. Here is one group's planning document and video.

Courses 2 & 3: Elementary and Secondary Art Methods

The next two art education courses were aimed at providing students opportunities to explore art education for specific age-levels, design developmentally appropriate lesson plans, and investigate instructional concerns like social/emotional intelligence, authentic assessment,

classroom management, and engage in group work that asks them to collaborate and co-create shared visions for their future classrooms. Their websites were further developed through the creation and inclusion of grade-specific lessons, instructional videos, classroom management plans, and a further developed resource collection. More complex functions of the digital website platform were introduced and students continued to practice regular maintenance through updating their teaching website. Regular discussion surrounded the concept of public presence online and asks students to consider adding certain site elements like an introductory page, links to social media, a contact page, and a more comprehensive artist page that showcases work from their multiple studio courses. They were led to consider their site as more than a depository for course production, but rather a platform to more holistically present themselves as future art teacher. The students engaged in peer review of their websites and showed their websites to others outside their class and major for further perspective. They explored what messages were conveyed through content and design and used that feedback to improve their site.

One example from the elementary methods course that utilized an iteration of the action research cycle and engaged students in digital planning and documentation was the "Ideal Space Project." After discussing literature that considers what the space of a classroom means for creative learning (Broome, 2013; Day & Hurwitz, 2012) and technology-forward environments (Pierce, 2015) as well as sharing what they had experienced in their field placements, students met with their groups to collaborate and co-create a shared vision for the ideal elementary art classroom. The process asked them to consider set limitations while reaching for inventive ways to create a classroom space. Groups inevitably encountered media and/or structural issues that required them to rethink, test, act, revise, and reconsider. Students were constantly out of their seats, hunting down materials, and acting out situations to communicate their ideas to one another. They engaged with one another as artists, researchers, and teachers trying to create a well-crafted space that considered what they know about art, teaching, and learning. When the project came to a close, students wrote a collaborative statement of their shared vision and an individual reflection of the project. They presented their projects to one another in class, to the art building in a physical showcase, and to the world on their websites. Here is one example of a student's journey through "The Ideal Space".

An example from the secondary methods course that capitalized on the use of digital multimedia use in these sophomore-level courses is "The Good Teacher Project" where students selected an honored lecturer from Miami University's art education lecture series. After engaging in archival research, they wrote an interpreted script to engage with their lecturer by becoming them. Their presentation had to be showcased digitally and displayed on their site. One example is featured here by one of our pre-service students. The student

incorporated a conversational approach using digital means to engage the audience, displaying the connections she had made with a master in the field of art education and an audience-friendly approach. The video is also accessible on her website resources page along with other relevant resources.

Course 4: Art Across the Curriculum

In this course, art education students were placed in a public school classroom with a teacher of a subject other than art. Course content focused on art-centered learning across the curriculum (Marshall & Donahue, 2014). Pre-service students coordinated with their cooperating teacher to redesign and teach an art integrated lesson which fit into the scope and sequence of the non-art curriculum. Beyond readings and activities, enacting deeper levels of reflection (Danker, 2017; Lee, 2005; Rodgers, 2002; Schön, 1983) through digital journaling was emphasized. Final reflective presentations were video recorded and used as a starting point in the following course, *Professional Dispositions in Art Education*.

In the "Educational and Museum Resources for Contemporary Art" project, students researched and wrote an interdisciplinary lesson plan based on *The Miami Portfolio: past + present = future*, a collection of prints by past and present Miami University Art Department faculty and part of the permanent collection at the university art museum. Lessons were linked on the museum's website.

Course 5: Professional Dispositions in Art Education

This course was designed to engage students in the practice of professional dispositions including physical and online presence, networking, interviewing, and the creation of professional documents. As with earlier courses, the digital portfolio served as a platform for developing their professional identity. During this course, however, students moved away from maintaining it as a learning portfolio (Karsenti, Dumouchel, & Collin, 2014) to an employment or hiring-centered portfolio (Fanning, 2008; Whitworth, Deering, Hardy, & Jones, 2011). They worked on personalizing the central message of their portfolio, making clear its intent and streamlining the individualized structure. They added personal philosophy statements for teaching and artistry and spent dedicated time choosing only their best work to remain on the site.

One example of a digitally-centered process and product for this course was the "ARTed Talk" series (Baer, 2017). Students spent half of the course focusing on an issue of personal importance within art education, wrote a script, and gave an ARTed Talk. The series was modeled after TED.com and featured a lengthy curriculum leading up to the talk. The process involved studying current issues in art education, conducting ongoing conversations with

classmates, presenting regularly on camera and off, investigating the relationship between confidence and posture (Cuddy, Wilmuth, & Carney, 2012), and engaging regularly in peer review. It was a long and scaffolded process designed to give students the space and time to ask questions, collect and test their ideas, and then return with newly forming ideas. The series gave students an opportunity to become part of an advocacy discourse in their future career field. Their practiced and passionate voices are now part of the ongoing conversations within the field of art education and can be viewed globally, thanks to their digital presentation.

Course 6: Saturday Art Practicum

In the Saturday Art course, pre-service students began by selecting a theme to guide the six-week unit curriculum they created and taught for their designated age level. A Saturday Art program website, created by faculty, functions to communicate with parents of students in the community-based program, guide parents and community members to student portfolios, and work as a digital accompaniment to exhibit student work (Lackey, 2008). The fall 2014 program theme was "Heroes" and in spring 2015 we focused on "Where in the World?" The linked websites provided an avenue for teaching the importance of digital documentation and communication in and outside the art classroom. The Saturday Art student teachers also engaged in peer review and self-reflection via a video-recorded teaching assignment. For the assignment they recorded themselves teaching one of their Saturday Art lessons and took part in continued discourse alone and with others (peers and faculty) concerning their teaching. Here, pre-service students had opportunity to envision and reflect on new ways to connect theory and practice in a teaching setting (Kalin & Kind, 2006).

Student Teaching in Art

During the student teaching semester, students captured their teaching performances through video and conducted extensive analysis and self-reflection (Ajayi, 2016; Coffey, 2014). Additionally, weekly video reflections were introduced as an assignment and a tool for deeper understanding of their teacher-self. Building upon professional identity skills developed in the *Professional Dispositions in Art Education* course, many of the video reflection prompts tied these skills to classroom practice. Towards the end of the semester, students watched all of their own videos, and observed and reflected at a deeper level (Baer, Danker, Klatt, & Danker, in press). Finally, students presented and critiqued their websites with one another as they prepared for the job search.

Moving Forward

The sequence of courses leading up to student teaching along with a program full of digital technology allowed students to consider and re-consider how the tools they use and the

content they develop are inevitably intertwined with how they see themselves as artist/researcher/teachers. They engaged in a/r/tographic processes exploring the intersections of what it means to simultaneously be artist, researcher, and teacher. Our students also made meaning of their experiences in and outside the classroom by practicing the action research cycle. Both methods have offered foundational understandings for how they come to experience and understand teaching and learning. Technological processes and products provided a means for such exploration and opened new possibilities for reflection, research, and creativity.

Our program continues to evolve as we work with pre-service students to create updated and digitally relevant curriculum. We enable new ways for our students to reflect and reconsider the work of teaching and learning. We also continue to navigate the complexities of our course experiences, making sure that they align and build upon one another. Our hope is that through our program, the pre-service students gain access to a broader spectrum of skills that, along with the digital portfolio, act as a catalyst for advancing forward the ever-evolving field of art education.

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About the Authors

Stephanie Baer is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts, Masters in Secondary Teaching, and Ph.D. in Educational Studies at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. She taught middle and high school art in Kansas and Colorado before returning to the post-secondary classroom. Baer's dissertation, "Re-Envisioning Fear: The Role of Conversation in an Arts Classroom for Prospective Teachers," won the 2014 American Educational Research Association Arts and Learning Dissertation Award. In 2015 she initiated the annual ARTed Talk series at Miami where art education students give a TED.com-style talk on their passions within the field of art education. Her research interests lie in pre-service teacher education, novice teacher experience and advocacy, and technology in teaching and learning. Professional website: http://www.stephaniebaer.com

Stephanie Danker is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). She earned her doctorate in art education through University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, master's degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, and bachelor's through James Madison University. A native of Virginia, she taught art in Fairfax County Public Schools for 6 years. Research interests include: art integration, reflective practice, social justice, professional development, visual culture, contemporary art, collaboration, and art education pedagogy. A recent professional highlight was spending 4 weeks at Harvard as a 2017 NEH Summer Fellow for the institute, "What Happened to the Civil Rights Movement?" Professional website: http://www.teachingportfoliodanker.weebly.com

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