

**“Building a Sense of Global Identity through
Artifacts in Freshman Composition Classrooms”**

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Abstract:

Queensborough Community College, part of the City University of New York, is an Hispanic serving institution with 26% Hispanic population. Students learn alongside students from 143 countries bringing language experience in Spanish, French, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Chinese, Pushto, and Farsi. We are preparing our students for a future in which information networks are readily available, situating our students in a global search engine. In addition, increasingly our students come into academic communities with transnational identities. This requires that our students be prepared to create connections, to synthesize identity and information in a way that facilitates the bonds of relations that create coherences and communities. Broad based networks rely on deep, personal abilities to both present ourselves and understand others in technological environments. Our colleges welcome students from around the world into new learning spaces to join in learning experiences that must also connect to authentic meaning making that is rooted in communities of origin at the same time that those origins are incorporated into an understanding of a future self in a new space.

In this article we argue that the use of artifacts in technological spaces not only help students express an authentic self but also create an authentic audience. Integrative learning practices that

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begin with the student and move that student to imagine a future self in a broad network of relations with an authentic audience transforms the classroom space into a social network based on disciplined ways of knowing.

Teaching composition to entering freshman in the multicultural classroom is a rich challenge for teachers. Many teachers focus on providing content that represents the diverse backgrounds within the class. This approach might be called the “heritage” approach. The teacher draws on family experiences, knowledge of cultures of origin, religious communities, and meaning making that has been a part of the student’s life as memories are preserved. In another approach, teachers focus on what is bringing students from diverse backgrounds into new communities, cultures and neighborhoods. This might be called the “adaptive” approach as students from around the world share a common environment and create new artifacts and languages that express their desire to be a part of concerns in a new geographical location. The first approach stresses building on already existing structures of meaning making while the second opens up into the dynamics of selection of new opportunities and relationships.

Using technology to structure learning objectives around artifacts, teachers can begin to combine both approaches to bring the student an integrative experience in learning. By juxtaposing artifacts with a rich cultural heritage against artifacts encountered in their immediate experience students can begin to build on prior knowledge to analyze and synthesize new knowledge in ways that makes learning visible.

Donald R.Schon in The Reflective Practitioner stresses that it is a combination of these approaches that best prepares students for careers in the 21st C. By understanding how

technology can be folded in sociological change and how artistic practices that stress design and flexibility can organize such change, Schon's thought prepares students for the shifting surfaces of exchange and decision making that characterize 21st C. collaborations (p.266). New technologies used in the classroom connect students who have "transnational identities" not only to their homelands but to larger global networks within which they can begin to communicate. Beyond the classroom, new career opportunities offer positions in institutions that draw on technology to gain shared information and perspectives. Being able to negotiate between knowledge that is familiar and a part of one's "heritage," and the unfamiliar knowledge that belongs to a vastly different set of experiences is a required skill, one that combines both social intelligence and the ability to communicate in meaningful ways in technological collaborations.

Locus of Control in Learning Systems

Schon's work on learning systems grows out of his interest in John Dewey's theories of inquiry. In Art as Experience John Dewey provides a way to understand how artifacts play a major role in moving students from the confusion of experience into the forms of expression necessary to communicate that experience to others. Through artifacts, students begin to manage the difference between the familiar and the unfamiliar. To structure the space of learning within this space of "confusion," Dewey uses the "Reflection Cycle." In a careful step by step process that relies on the psychology of sense memory, Dewey outlines the way the mind uses the energy of tension and release within confusion to form artistic designs that more fully express how the individual attaches an intimacy of relations within his or her environment (p.117). Instead of relying on habits of mind and reflex thinking that exists within the confusion, Dewey disrupts habits and automatic responses to open a space for reflection on form using artifacts. What must

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be stressed here is that this disruption is very active. Within the resulting confusion is a yearning for action and resolution (p.224).

In managing this new knowledge, if the locus of control is outside the student and the student's job is to react to outer stimulations in lectures, those reactions become unexamined surface knowledge. On the other hand, if the reflective cycle is designed to allow the student his own locus of control, the student's own yearning for coherence makes visible the relation between the tensions in confusion and the forms of knowledge that need to be restructured (p.50-51). From this yearning for coherence, students can develop the ability to watch themselves form ideas or reflect and, thereby, make choices about how to form those ideas. The locus of control in which learning occurs must be within the internal space of the student, confusing as that space may be.

While Dewey's work is based in Art and Expression focuses on how art can help us understand dynamic reflections of design and decision making in the midst of confusion, Donald Schon's work in The Reflective Practitioner considers the way technological knowledge can foster management and design in sociological change. Schon describes metacognition in terms of its ability to see the unique and different information in relation to the familiar within systems of exchange (p.138). Schon engages the philosophical problem that separates thought from action and attempts to provide a way of situating reflection in action. If our students live in a future in which rapid technological changes create shifting surfaces of exchange within unprecedented problems, actions can still be decisive and informed. Prior knowledge can be used in new and creative ways guided by design.

In Art as Expression, John Dewey focuses on the individual thought process through which artifacts are used to move from a meaningful confusion to design in formalized expression. The thrust of Dewey's argument was that art is an active part of everyday life, an energized part of lived experience. In "the red swing project" website Dewey's ideas are used as they encourage participants to make a red swing and put it in a setting that seems alien or strange. In this act of engagement, the individual changes the environment even as the individual is also changed by his own engagement. Vital choices are made by the individual in the artist process that disrupts automatic habits of mind. In spite of the differences in the approaches, both Dewey and Schon share what Schon calls "double loop" learning as the negotiator learns information twice, once in his experience and once in an adaptive relation to a new context (Schön 1983: 138).

the red swing project



>> HOME

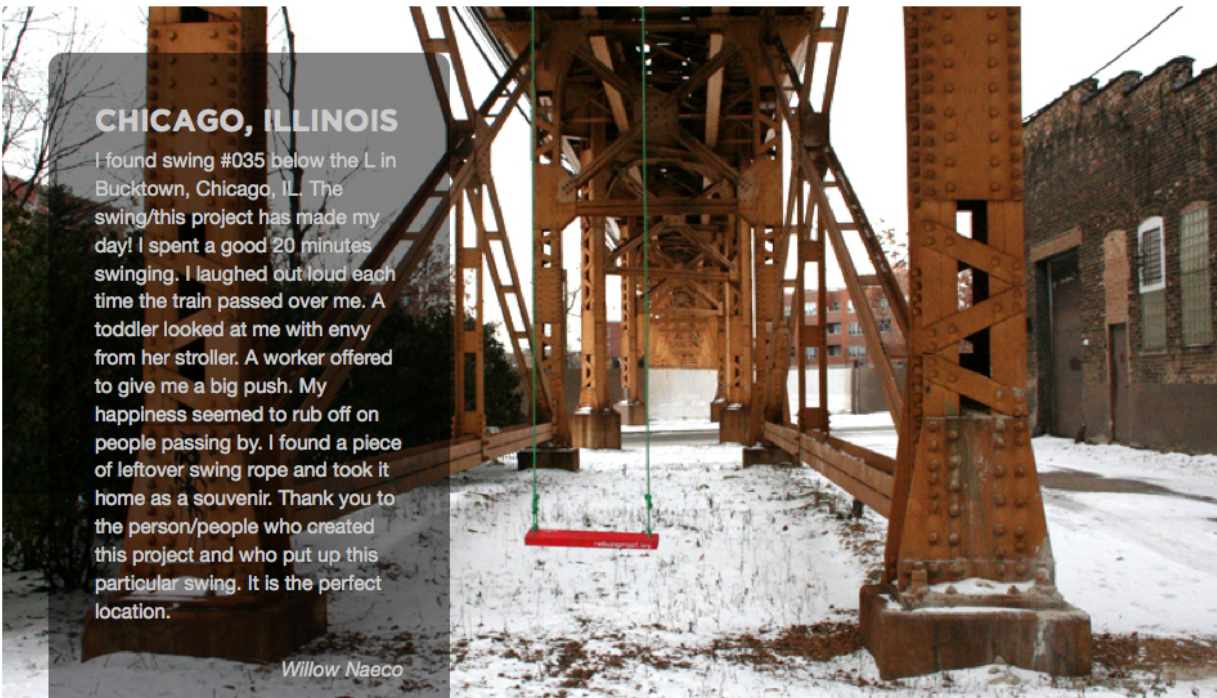
ABOUT

BLOG

LOCATIONS

GET INVOLVED

NARRATIVES



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

I found swing #035 below the L in Bucktown, Chicago, IL. The swing/this project has made my day! I spent a good 20 minutes swinging. I laughed out loud each time the train passed over me. A toddler looked at me with envy from her stroller. A worker offered to give me a big push. My happiness seemed to rub off on people passing by. I found a piece of leftover swing rope and took it home as a souvenir. Thank you to the person/people who created this project and who put up this particular swing. It is the perfect location.

Willow Naeco

WE ANONYMOUSLY HANG RED SWINGS IN PUBLIC PLACES INSPIRING PLAYFULNESS AROUND THE WORLD

Retrieved 9/3/2013 from <http://www.redswingproject.org/> 9/3/2013

Solution: Building Authenticity Using Dewey and Schon

If educators are to help students enter into systems of communication with global networks of relation, it is necessary to build both authentic identity and an authentic audience within the classroom.

At the LaGuardia Community College “Making Connections” conference in 2008, Darren Cambridge presented his ideas on the relation between authenticity and deliberation in student learning. His presentation entitled “Authenticity, Deliberation and Integrity” proposed that teachers can scaffold assignments in a way that provides students with an experience of choice and reflection on choices that helps the students move through different discursive communities and networks of relation, while seeing the self who composes there. To do this, teachers need to participate with students in opening the space of reflection at vital transitions within an active learning project. In seeing, indeed, in constructing how one part relates to the next, the student is actively changing a relation. The capacity to “compose” oneself, or give form to experience in different disciplines, builds what Cambridge calls the “symphonic self,” the self able to create harmony among the forms and artifacts that are a product of active learning and knowledge production. If students begin to understand how different disciplines relate in a larger academic community devoted to knowledge production, if students begin to take an active role in changing and negotiating that system, they are more prepared to understand the global communities of discourse they encounter and use those communities for active negotiations of exchange.

What has been an unanticipated consequence of using Cambridge’s approach in the classroom is that students begin to create a harmony among the different communities within the classroom. Projects that are individually produced but influenced by diverse cultural collaborations begin to transcend a narrow sense of artistic form to see how the kinds of harmonies and coherences art achieves have much in common, in spite of vast global differences. For instance, one of the most popular essays used in Freshman Composition classrooms is Jose Torres’ “Letter to a Child Like Me.” After doing a survey of famous Hispanic personalities who make great contributions to

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culture building, Torres references the work of Katsushika Hokusai and in this gesture brings cultures together into a global effort of shared work (p.164).

In the classroom that is in the beginning of the semester defined by race, gender and ethnicity, students begin to form new communities of collaboration around shared concerns and problem solving that transcend national boundaries. Students who have little in common in the beginning of the semester both share a concern for children who are living in refugee camps, or children who have been traumatized by wars taking place in public spaces. Students begin to identify with institutions devoted to problem solving in the areas of concern. In their presentations, they will present the work of those international institutions.

Building Authenticity in Self Expression and Problem Solving

In his poem “Marginalia” Billy Collins refers to those meanings we carry with us for years, “like a locket,” and revisit and remake from time to time as we reintegrate our sense of self and grow in relation to the world and its demands of us. Tim O’Brien writes about “The Things They Carried” into the confusions of the war experience. By beginning in assignments that ask students to write about their own experiences of meaning making, we can let students begin in a place that is familiar, even as it opens into a form of expression that is new, into confusion. In this way, they begin to see that academic meaning and knowledge is rooted in the same sense of bonding, community and family as their own concerns, with a difference. In the example that follows, what is so interesting about Tara’s work is that she is actively negotiating meaning and value and taking a long time to make a choice. She is prolonging the deliberation process, opening up the space of reflection.

Assessment:

As part of the original team that created the Student Wiki Interdisciplinary Learning Group at Queensborough Community College, I was able to incorporate many of the ideas in this article into our learning communities. Assessment of the work of this group was done in 2010 (Report).

EN 101 Enrollment Fall 2010	N	Pass Rate EN101
All Enrolled	2,872	85.0%
Non-SWIG	2,721	84.4%
SWIG	151	95.8%

The Lesson:

Goal: Learning to Revise and Reflect

We will draft out a personal narrative and then revise each paragraph using the writing techniques from expert writers. For assignment grid and rubric, see appendix.

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Draft of Personal Narrative:

Select a memory that you carry with you for its meaning. You may not really understand why it is meaningful to you, yet its significance seems almost obvious. It may be a family story, a neighborhood event, a tale from your country or a story your family told you. It could also be about song which has lyrics that are meaning to you. Write a five paragraph narrative in which you use the writing techniques from our readings to move from the authorial perspective, to concrete description of a subject of interest, a description of action, an alternative view or conflict within a specific setting, and a synthesis or tentative resolution. After you have written your narrative, create a visual storyboard to accompany your narrative in power point. Your visuals can be family photos, personal digital photos, cartoons, web images, news photos, paintings, or songs. Remember, your visuals add another way of knowing or another dimension to your story. The visuals should not be used to illustrate the words but to add something new to the words.

Student Example of Digital Storytelling: Tara

<http://media.acc.gcc.cuny.edu:8088/faculty/darcy/EN-103-SP12/SHAM/SHAM.html>

“The characteristic of artistic design is the intimacy of relations that hold the parts together” (Dewey p. 117).

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