

A Project Led by Annie Carpenter with Dr Sam Illingworth, Rachel Kelly and Anthony Hall

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Introduction

Testing the Field was a weekend trip to ancient woodlands for Manchester Metropolitan University students and staff from both the School of Art and Faculty of Science and Engineering. The project explored notions of transdisciplinarity, learning in the wild and learning without assessment.

The trip was hosted at Middlewood Trust in Lancashire, with students and staff from across the two faculties. Workshops took place in poetry, experimental sound recording and Ikebana, amongst others. The project was one of a series of art/science pedagogic research experiments taking place between the faculties, aiming to expose students and staff to each discipline's curiosities, methodologies and working environments.



Aim

To test cross faculty interdisciplinary contexts and collaboration between 16 cross faculty students and staff from both MMU Faculty of Science and Engineering and Manchester School of Art at the Middlewood Trust, Lancashire. Middlewood Trust is a permaculture community which provides an ideal context away from the university to observe and test collaborative interdisciplinary practice.

Objectives

1. Students/staff will be able to experience cross disciplinary learning experiences.
2. Students /staff will be able to apply learning into their own disciplinary practice.
3. The workshops will enable creative teaching and learning to be tested.
4. The workshops enable students/staff to consider different disciplinary styles .

The Residency Planning Methodology

The residency was organised over six months, with students selected being from a range of levels and fields. Selection criteria was designed to facilitate a faculty and gender fair split, ensuring that individual practice had some interdisciplinary learning. Artists Rachel Kelly and Anthony Hall were invited to host creative workshops during the visit.

Rachel Kelly from Manchester School of Art chose to explore collaborative exchange and the visualisation of collaboration. She set up an Ikebana activity where students could make an organimodel display to represent their experience of the residency

Anthony Hall is an artist and PhD candidate who works with science concepts and equipment to explore multi-sensory perceptual illusion. Participants were able to experience sound, touch, and vision through a range of sensory tests, as well as collect and observe micro-animals and micrometeorites.

Sam Illingworth led a collaborative Haiku writing session where everyone contributed their reflections as words and poetry. Two poetry sessions were run during the weekend where ideas of contrast were explored. The contrast between the two faculties and types of student was reflected upon during this exercise.

Evaluation



Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) study of the Lifeworld or Lebenswelt, meaning the environments in which we live, play, work and learn are worlds we can experience together (Given 2008: 2). This is not stating the obvious, but drawing attention to the immediacy and spontaneity by which design thinking happens by conjecture (Cross 2011). Creative thinking and learning within collaborative activity takes place during action and is pre-reflective, as Heidegger in his 1927 work Being and Time considers "ready-at-hand" and "present-at-hand", knowing to be (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2014:5). Pre-reflective activity describes the psychological zone where most of our everyday lived experience and learning lies, but as Heidegger illuminates, it is only in the process of stepping back from our ready-at-hand activities we can consider the present-at-hand. The process of experiential contingency experienced within the residency is a way to explore the present-at-hand, because when one starts to see one's own practice via the presence of others, unique perspectives and reflections can be made.



Conclusion

In the professional world, collaboration is the operational model that is required to facilitate production. Therefore, within teaching and learning at undergraduate level, if the degree is to fully prepare students for professional practice, there needs to be a supportive teaching and learning environment.

The result of the residency was that each faculty created a collaborative 'vision' and was able to identify where the value within this project lay for them individually and within the greater context of their degree studies. Recommendations are summarised as follows:

1. Incorporate strategically the ideas of The Lifeworld (Husserl) to enable cross-disciplinary practice and to develop creative and innovative teaching and learning experiences.
2. This can happen by reviewing the terms and definitions we use to describe collaborative practice, so for example, we can work more towards shared learning than shared practice.
3. Construct project teaching and learning plans which support professional practice alongside academic learning outcomes.

Image References and Film Links

1. Image of Middlewood Trust taken by Annie Carpenter
2. Image taken from Testing The Field Film 2017 created between collaborators and Lloyd Coleman Films. <https://vimeo.com/212587428>
3. Image of Anthony Hall's workshop taken by Annie Carpenter
4. Testing The Field Good Practice Exchange Film <https://youtu.be/X6JLthrgpDU>

References

- Given, L (2008) The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods accessed: <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.mmu.ac.uk/10.4135/9781412963909.n317>
- Cross, N (2011) Design Thinking: Understanding How Designers Think and Work. Oxford, Berg Publishers.
- Vygotsky, L.S. Mind in Society (1978) Harvard University Press.