

Contemporary Art and the Level 1 Higher Education Curriculum: Empathy, alienation and educational inclusion.

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Summary

Can a Tracey Emin bed or a Grayson Perry pot be a more productive object of study than a Raphael Madonna or a John Constable landscape for some Level 1 university students, allowing them to make meaningful connections between the artworks and their own lives? Eliot Eisner (1984; 1994; 1998; 2002), one of the most influential voices in art education, has long argued that studying visual art can help us to discover the contours of our emotional selves, enabling us to have experiences we can acquire from no other source. However, various art educators and writers (e.g. McFee, 1986; Lippard, 1990; Cahan & Kocur, 1996; Chalmers, 1996; Boughton & Mason, 1999) have observed that visual art education in the West is still dominated by a culturally exclusive canon of western artworks and that this limits the extent to which socially, culturally and ethnically diverse students can benefit from and engage with the study of art history, leaving them feeling alienated and disempowered.

Calls to ‘abandon the canon’ in the name of inclusion are often voiced with reference to school art education but are applied less frequently to a higher education context. This paper details one of the first phases of a PhD research project intended to address this imbalance by exploring whether including contemporary art in the Level 1 undergraduate curriculum has the potential to reduce the barriers to learning faced by the ever-more diverse range of students entering higher education in the 21st century. An online questionnaire was used to survey 420 undergraduate students about their experiences of studying contemporary art in a short Level 1 Open University course. Early research findings have implications beyond the discipline of art education, indicating that while the western canon may indeed have the power to exclude on race, socio-economic, gender and age-related grounds, just replacing canonical curriculum content with a different kind of visual art (for example contemporary art) is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution to minimising educational exclusion. Significantly, it appears that there is an age-related divide in adult students’ feelings about contemporary art, in that while younger students can relish its challenging form and content, finding the subject matter relevant to their own lives and enjoying the emotional demands of studying some of the most controversial artworks, some older students’ preconceptions about contemporary art’s lack of worth prevents them from any productive engagement with it. However, the research findings also indicate that it is possible such preconceptions can be a starting point for a meaningful engagement with contemporary art when explored and addressed through a pedagogy featuring meta-cognitive strategies and reflective writing, offering students a framework within which to locate and make sense of their reactions to shocking and controversial contemporary art and the skills to work with the multiple interpretations and open-ended meanings it commonly involves.

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Introduction and Rationale

“This makes me very angry. She’s having a laugh at our expense. How can you compare this with something by Constable or Raphael? I didn’t sign up for this course to be taught about this sort of rubbish.”

Ralph, aged 68, Derbyshire

“I absolutely love it... This really made me think about how subjects from everyday life, from my world, could be expressed through art, could be worthy of being art. Tracey’s bed is like my life....messy!”

Jo, aged 24, Essex.

The comments above refer to Tracey Emin’s installation *My Bed* (http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/tracey_emin_my_bed.htm) and were made by two undergraduates studying the British Open University’s Level 1 short course *Making Sense of the Arts*, which introduces students to art history via a study of artworks by artists who have been nominated for the Turner Prize (Awarded annually to an artist who has made an outstanding contribution to art in Britain in the last 12 months). Arguably, the differences of opinion shown in these comments highlight a dilemma increasingly facing curriculum designers and teachers within all areas of higher education – how to reconcile the interests, motivations, values and needs of the ever-more diverse range of students entering our universities, in the interests of educational inclusion. This need is widely voiced as a priority area for curriculum development. Melanie Nind (Nind, 2005: 5), for example, identifies ‘the need for the curriculum to make connections with learners’ perspectives – to start from, and value, what learners bring...’, while the author and social activist Bell Hooks (1994: 8) has long asserted that an ‘engaged pedagogy,’ in which ‘everyone’s presence is acknowledged’ is essential to generating the ‘excitement’ needed for meaningful and effective learning.

Much inclusion-related research has been carried out in the name of multicultural education, focusing on ethnic diversity, for example Geneva Gay’s extensive exploration of ways in which ethnically diverse students’ success might be improved through ‘culturally responsive teaching’ (Gay, 2000). Some of this research into multicultural education has focused on the visual arts, with various art educators and writers (e.g. McFee, 1986; Lippard, 1990; Cahan & Kocur, 1996; Chalmers, 1996; Boughton & Mason, 1999) observing that visual art education in the west is still dominated by a culturally exclusive canon of western artworks and suggesting that this is compromising educational inclusion by denying diverse students the chance to benefit from studying the visual arts.

However, empirical studies in this area tend to be located within primary and secondary school settings (e.g. Hooks, 1995; Dash, 1999; Young, 1999; Freedman, 2000; Knight, 2006), with relatively little written about ethnic exclusion in higher education art study. There is even less research into other types of exclusion in undergraduate art education – such as that resulting from barriers to learning connected with students’ sexuality, socio-economic background and age. Arguably though, the dilemma of how to reconcile diverse learners’ needs is particularly pertinent within higher education, and in emotionally-rich subjects like the visual arts, where adult learners’ values, expectations and existing knowledge can collide with the artworks that they study, sometimes resulting

in intense feelings of empathy and at other times in feelings of alienation and disempowerment, as the comments above suggest.

The project discussed in this paper addresses issues that are common to all humanities disciplines where a canon of preferred works tends to dominate the curriculum. It is intended to contribute to pedagogical research in inclusive education by exploring whether including western and non-western contemporary art in the Level 1 undergraduate curriculum (rather than the more commonly found western canonical art) might help to reconcile diverse students' needs through a 'pedagogy of recognition' (Slee, 1999: 200), resulting in a curriculum within which students can 'recognise their own experiences and identities' (Nind, 2005: 5), while also assessing the extent to which Mayer's (2008: 77) assertion that:

'Contemporary art is about now! It's about figuring out who we are, who we are becoming, and how to live, know and act...What could be more relevant?' applies to adult learners".

Methodology

Research design

The research project discussed here comprises a single instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) – the Open University Level 1 short course Making Sense of the Arts, which introduces students to the humanities through the study of poetry, history and art history. The course has no entry requirements, is designed for students who have not studied before or who may have studied a long time ago, and lasts for a maximum of 20 weeks. Students have an allocated tutor and all tuition is conducted by telephone and through written feedback on two formative assignments. (An optional online forum also offers students the opportunity to discuss the course with their peers.) Upon successfully completing a summative End of Course Assessment (ECA) students gain 10 credit points at Level 1. The art history section of Making Sense of the Arts – the main focus of this research project - is unusual in including contemporary art (art produced after 1980 by Turner Prize nominees) in a Level 1 course.

The mixed model approach

The Making Sense of the Arts case study is located within a sequential (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) 'mixed model' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) research design in which both quantitative and qualitative research questions, data collection techniques and analysis techniques have 'equivalent status' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998: 15) throughout the research process (see Appendix 1). While mixed methods research designs have plentiful detractors (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 9-10) they are becoming ever more popular, with numerous advantages being identified (see Greene, Caracelli et al., 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Bryman, 2006; Greene, 2008). In the context of this study, the choice of a mixed model strategy was intended to achieve a more rigorous, more comprehensive and more complete understanding of adult students' experiences of art education than would be possible using qualitative or quantitative methods alone.

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The survey

The findings reported in this paper are the result of one of the earliest phases of the overall research project - an online questionnaire comprising four sections:

Section 1: Various questions gathering information about students' age, gender, disabilities (if any), ethnicity, previous educational qualifications (if any), and previous art study (if any).

Section 2: Likert-scale and open-ended questions intended to gain information about students' reasons for studying 'Making Sense of the Arts', the outcomes they hoped to achieve, the extent to which they felt they had achieved these outcomes, and any factors negatively impacting on their study experience.

Section 3: (i) Open-ended questions intended to gain information about students' initial feelings about the prospect of studying contemporary art in 'Making Sense of the Arts' and the extent to which those feelings changed after studying the art history section of the course; (ii) Likert scale-style questions intended to gain information about students' feelings about the effectiveness of the various components of the art history section of 'Making Sense of the Arts'

Section 4: Semantic differential scales intended to gain information about students' reactions to 17 contemporary and non-contemporary, canonical and non-canonical artworks (see Appendix 2), some of which also featured in 'Making Sense of the Arts'.

The online survey format was chosen for both economic and logistical reasons. Firstly, the cost of printing over 800 copies of a fairly lengthy full-colour questionnaire appeared prohibitive and the online version offered accessibility advantages in allowing participants to magnify the images featured in the survey. It also offered reactive routing options, allowing students to skip certain sections of the survey if appropriate for example, if a student indicated that they had completed the course but had not studied the art history section (The 'Making Sense of the Arts' assessment strategy allows this, as the discipline of art history is not a compulsory option in the only summative assignment in the course) they were automatically taken from Section 2 to Section 4 of the questionnaire. Furthermore, with a large sample the time advantages of using an online questionnaire rather than a postal one were very attractive, the data being immediately available for analysis.

All students in the November 2007 cohort (n=420) were contacted by email in the first instance and invited to complete the questionnaire (The research is currently being repeated with a second cohort of students (n=440), in advance of conducting semi-structured telephone interviews with 20 students chosen from both cohorts). It was hoped that the use of personalised email invitations would minimise the problems of identity verification and spoof respondents that are often identified as undermining the validity of self-selecting online samples (see Roberts & Parks, 2001; Hewson, Yule et al., 2003: 44). Internet access is not compulsory for Making Sense of the Arts students and recent research (UK Online Centres, 2007) indicates that there is still a 'digital divide' in the UK, with 75% of people counted as socially excluded also being digitally excluded. For this reason, students who had not indicated a 'preferred' email address (and had been

emailed via their default OU address) (n=67) were also posted a paper version of the questionnaire two weeks after the initial email had been sent (As the questionnaire responses were anonymous it was impossible to check whether these students had already completed the survey). While this procedure introduces validity-related issues concerning the 'mode effects' resulting from the use of different administration methods (see de Vaus, 2007: 131) it was hoped that these would be outweighed by the benefits gained from avoiding sample bias. More importantly, it was considered ethically indefensible to exclude students with no Internet access from participating in a research project intended to address educational inclusion.

The decision to use semantic differential scale questions to collect data about students' responses to a range of artworks was inspired by recent use of the scales within the field of empirical aesthetics (e.g. Martindale, Moore et al., 1990; Locher, Smith et al., 2001; Silvia, 2005; 2006; Silvia & Brown, 2007; Tan & Tollenaar, 2007) where they are commonly used to explore the link between personality traits, previous experience of art study and artistic preference. (For a summary of such studies, see Furnham & Walker, 2001: 998-999; Martindale, 2007.) This research has relevance in the context of educational inclusion, highlighting the possibility that barriers to learning associated with the study of visual art may be closely connected with personality differences in addition to differences in students' preferred learning styles - a common focus of educational research. It will be further explored in the next phase of this research project.

Originally devised by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) the semantic differential scale is a tool which measures peoples' affective reactions or attitudes to stimulus words, concepts or images in terms of ratings on bipolar scales defined with contrasting adjectives at each end (e.g. 'happy-sad' or 'simple-complex'). Typically, seven point scales are used (although some studies have used five and six-point scales). The present study uses a five point scale chosen to reduce the time burden on respondents and to encourage spontaneity of response. The adjectives for this scale (see Figure 1) were selected via a multi-stage process.

First, a focus group comprising 5 non-art trained and 5 art-trained participants were asked to freely discuss the 17 artworks featuring in the questionnaire. A prototype scale was then designed, featuring the 20 most popular adjectives/adjectival phrases relating to the three basic dimensions of response identified by Osgood (1975) as being applicable to any concept or stimulus - namely Evaluation (e.g. 'worth studying-not worth studying'), Potency (e.g. 'weak-powerful') and Activity (e.g. complex-simple). Adjectives relating to a fourth dimension - Berlyne's (1974) 'Internal State' dimension (e.g. 'comforting-disturbing') - were also chosen. A selection of researcher-chosen antonyms were then added to the scale which was formatted so that negative and positive polarity was randomised for left-right position, thereby avoiding the possibility of biasing respondents' opinions by presenting potentially ambiguous (i.e. neither negative or positive) adjectives on a side of the scale that is clearly intended to represent one polarity. The scale was then piloted with 50 Open University humanities students before its use in the current survey.

Figure 2: Semantic differential scale for Raphael's *Madonna of the Meadows*

21. Please indicate your feelings about this work using these scales.

Artistic	<input type="radio"/>	Not artistic				
Beautiful	<input type="radio"/>	Ugly				
Comforting	<input type="radio"/>	Disturbing				
Dull	<input type="radio"/>	Exciting				
Easy to understand	<input type="radio"/>	Difficult to understand				
Emotionally intense	<input type="radio"/>	Lacks emotional impact				
Happy	<input type="radio"/>	Sad				
Imaginative	<input type="radio"/>	Unimaginative				
Intimate	<input type="radio"/>	Remote				
Offensive	<input type="radio"/>	Inoffensive				
Pointless	<input type="radio"/>	Important				
Relevant to my life	<input type="radio"/>	Not relevant to my life				
Repulsive	<input type="radio"/>	Attractive				
Simple	<input type="radio"/>	Complex				
Skilled	<input type="radio"/>	Lacks skill				
Subtle	<input type="radio"/>	Obvious				
Thought-provoking	<input type="radio"/>	Meaningless				
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	Pleasant				
Weak	<input type="radio"/>	Powerful				
Worth studying	<input type="radio"/>	Not worth studying				

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Findings and Implications

Analysis of the survey data is still in its early stages, with data collection for the second cohort of Making Sense of the Arts students still ongoing. However, the initial findings from the first cohort of students already appear significant. What follows is limited to discussion of open-ended answers and statistical frequencies; a fuller qualitative and quantitative analysis will take place once the data from the second cohort of students has been collected.

Empathy, Alienation and Educational Inclusion

A 69% survey response rate resulted in a final sample of 289 students, aged between 18 and 84, with a 71%/29% female/male gender balance (this is typical for OU arts courses). Students' previous educational qualifications ranged from no qualifications (38%) to qualifications at postgraduate level (5%) and 17% of respondents had studied art or art history prior to studying the subject in Making Sense of the Arts. As previously mentioned, the course assessment strategy allows students to pass the course without studying the art history section and this was the case for 11% of students in this first cohort. Students were predominately White British and only 9% declared a disability.

Initial feelings about studying contemporary art

An initial exploration of the collected data clearly indicated that the majority of students surveyed had been concerned about the prospect of studying contemporary art. The following comments, taken from an open-ended question asking 'What were your initial feelings about studying contemporary art in Y160' are typical:

'Terror!' I thought I would hate it.

I did not believe I would enjoy it especially when I saw type of art I was to study.

Quite apprehensive. It wasn't what attracted me to the course. I wouldn't have thought that my "modern art isn't really art" attitude would change much.

Of all the art history to choose, the Turner Prize must be the worst possible topic. I just couldn't drum up any enthusiasm for it...

I was sad that it had to be 'contemporary art'.

I began with the preconceived notion that modern art is meaningless.

I felt it was an ordeal to be endured.

I was disappointed that the course would not concentrate on older works. Initially I considered most contemporary art a 'scam'...

I was quite apprehensive. I had visited the Tate Modern various times and found some of the work very strange and hard to understand.

I looked forward to beginning a completely new (for me) field of study and felt let down by the works we were expected to study.

Trepidation - I would describe myself as more interested in Turner than the Turner Prize.

Frustrated...Old art is great art...that's why they're called the Old Masters. There's no comparison...Artists like Constable were real artists and people like Damien Hirst are just comen.

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One student's comment that *'my only exposure to the Turner Prize was through the media so I approached this section of the course with great of trepidation and cynicism'* highlights one of the challenges of teaching with contemporary art – the frequent negative portrayal in the media of artists such as Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, and of the Turner Prize itself, and the possibility that this has a negative impact on some adult students' motivation to learn about contemporary art. Walker (1999: 12; cited in Addison & Burgess, 2003: 111) talks of the media's 'utterly predictable knee-jerk reactions and populist attacks on contemporary art and artists', leading to 'manipulation of the readers' emotions and encouragement of philistine attitudes and aggressive feelings'.

The problems such media responses pose in terms of adult learners' study of contemporary art can be better understood in the context of a number of pedagogical theories. For example, Knowles' (1985) theory of andragogy, while having several weaknesses (Schapiro, 2003) offers some pertinent insights into adult learners' motivations and their need to be confident in what they have chosen to learn. Wlodkowski (1999: 74), building on Knowles' ideas, explains that adults want to learn what they find meaningful and of some significant value to their personal or professional life'. Judith Koroscik's (See Koroscik, 1982; 1990; 1990a; 1992a; 1992b; 1993; 1994; 1996; 1996a) notion of 'conservative tendencies' - 'the inclination of novices to approach learning by confirming preconceived ideas and personal biases, which sometimes reflect peer group consensus' (Efland, 2002: 119) – also appears relevant in the context of adult learners' initial negativity about the prospect of studying contemporary art. Visual culture theorist Kerry Freedman (2003: 83) makes a similar point about the possibility that the 'misconceptions' about art that learners might gain 'outside the classroom' can be a barrier to their learning.

Not all students were negative about the prospect of studying contemporary art, however. For example, one student revealed that she *'was over the moon'* and that *'it was knowing we were going to study the Turner Prize that made me sign up for the course'*. Another student confirmed that they were *'excited about the prospect of learning more about contemporary art'* and about *'unravelling some of its "mystique"'*. A third student mentioned *'initial feelings ...of openness, willingness to find out and excitement'*.

Changed feelings

Continuing the positive note, the questionnaire responses did indicate that studying Making Sense of the Arts had led to a change of heart amongst many of the most sceptical students, with 59% revealing that their feelings about the value of contemporary art had changed since studying the course and 71% indicating that the art history section of the course was more enjoyable than they had expected it to be. Again, the following comments are fairly typical:

I enjoyed the Art History VERY much and was pleasantly surprised at how much my attitudes to contemporary art have changed. I felt as though this section had the biggest impact on my confidence, as I feel I could hold my own now in a discussion on contemporary art.

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I am less judgemental and am now prepared to study and analyse each art work. I still have a feeling that some of the artists are conning us and that there is an 'Emperor's new clothes' aspect to the gullible observers.

I was absolutely amazed when in one of the exercises I found myself being positive about modern art. Me! The ECA art history subject Afrodizzia was a modern piece which included elephant dung in its media...At first I thought it was a gimmick but now I understand more about it and really enjoyed the piece and discussing it.

I want to go back to Tate Modern and have another look - I am sure I will still feel the same about some but perhaps I will be able to appreciate them more - even if I don't like them!

The course has helped me to look at things in a completely different way. I now realise that I don't have to like or even totally understand a piece of art work to be able to talk about it or think about it.

Particularly encouraging, in the interests of educational inclusion, was the fact that 66% of students said they were now more confident about discussing contemporary art with other people and several students commented that they felt they had gained access to a world that had previously seemed closed to them.

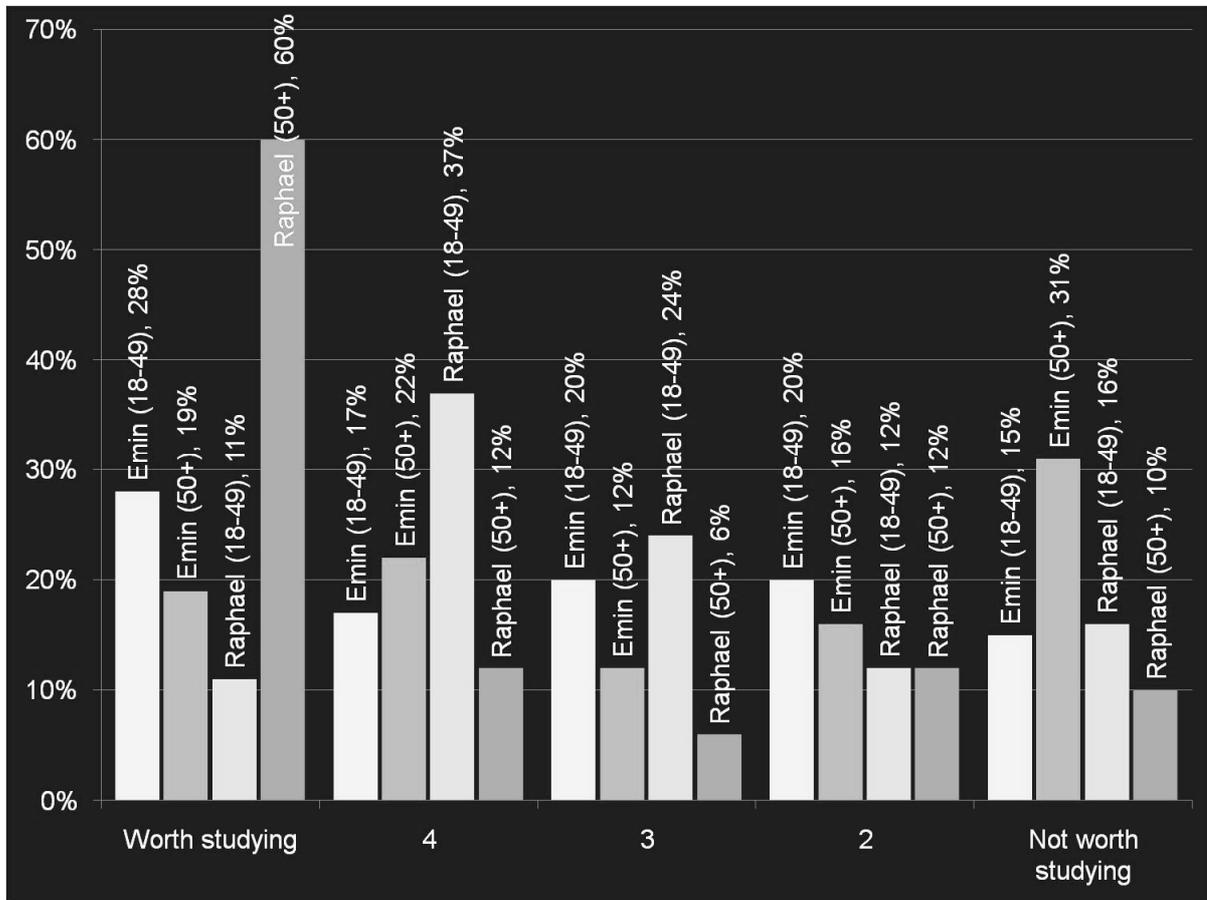
An age-related divide

As has already been seen, the reasons for students' initial negativity about studying contemporary art ranged from concerns that they would not be able to understand works whose meanings appeared obscure to feelings that such artworks were not art at all and were therefore not worth studying. Interestingly, their explanations appeared to be divided along age-related lines, with students aged over 50 tending to be the most cynical about whether Turner Prize art was worth studying. While a detailed analysis of the semantic differential scale data has yet to be conducted, an early exploration of the data also highlighted particularly significant correlations between students' age and their reactions to the 17 artworks featuring in the survey with students aged over 50 again tending to be the most negative about the contemporary artworks, more frequently judging them to be 'Not worth studying', 'Pointless' and 'Offensive', as shown in Figure 2 - a graph comparing students' responses to Tracey Emin's 'My Bed' and Raphael's 'Madonna of the Meadows'.

Judgements related to skill and emotional impact

Kozbelt (2004: 157) observes that 'two components frequently emerge in the discussion of artistic quality: technical skill and originality' and analysis of the semantic differential scale data did indeed indicate a link between students' judgements regarding the skills shown in an artwork (the adjective pair 'Skilled-Lacks Skill') and whether it was worth studying. Once again however, this was much more common amongst students aged over 50.

Figure 3: Chart comparing students' reactions to Raphael's *Madonna of the Meadows* and Tracey Emin's *My Bed*.



Students aged under 50 (and especially students aged under 30) appeared to be less likely to link the artist's apparent skill with the worth of an artwork and were more likely to base such a judgement on the emotional power of the work (using the adjective pairs 'Emotionally intense-Lacks emotional impact', 'Intimate-Remote' and 'Weak-Powerful'), rating an artwork to be 'worth studying' when they perceived it to be emotionally engaging and stimulating. These correlations will be further explored in the next phase of the research.

Foregrounding the monster

A commonly expressed objection to teaching with contemporary art at all educational levels is that students may be offended or upset by the challenging and controversial themes that are often addressed and the use of formal elements that are deliberately designed to shock and offend. Artist Mark Hutchinson confirms that 'in secondary education teachers often shy away from most contemporary art because they consider it too difficult, an art full of monsters, replete with vulgarity and coarseness' (Hutchinson, 1998: 144). British art educator and writer Lesley Burgess, writing about the challenges of teaching with controversial art in the secondary school curriculum, confirms that 'by refusing to engage with potentially problematic practices' educators may be 'missing an opportunity to confront important personal, social and cultural issues' (Burgess, 2003:

108). She proposes that by 'foregrounding the monster' (Burgess, 2003: 120) and addressing difficult, controversial or complex issues, contemporary art is actually particularly effective as a stimulus for students' achievement of a wide range of learning outcomes.

Interestingly, it was apparent from the semantic differential scale data that students' judgements about whether an artwork was worth studying were not necessarily dependent on their feeling comfortable about it, or finding it beautiful or pleasing. For example, it was not uncommon for a student to give an artwork a high score for being 'Worth Studying' while also indicating that they found it 'repulsive', 'offensive' or 'unpleasant'. Carole Becker's work is of interest here. Becker (1994: 119), a protégé of Hebert Marcuse, recommends that art educators should revisit Marcuse's belief that 'to be effective, art must exert its capacity for estrangement' and should challenge society's assumptions through 'the demands of intellectual and visual rigour and/or the heightened recognition of pleasure and pain' (Becker, 1994: 119-120). Marcuse's assertion that art only becomes effective (and perhaps also affective) when its content is embodied 'in an aesthetically challenging form that [pushes] the viewer...to a more complex, more emotional, or revelatory understanding of the problems posed by the work' (p121) merits further exploration in the context of the Making Sense of the Arts survey data, especially in terms of exploring the possibility that a pedagogy employing meta-cognitive strategies and reflective writing could give students an access point to and a way of making sense of such aesthetically challenging art.

Silvia and Brown (2007: 100), exploring 'the emotions that lead people to reject, censor, and deface works of art', differentiate between 'anger' and 'disgust', reporting that 'anger was associated with appraising a picture as incongruent with one's values and as intentionally offensive, and disgust was associated with appraising a picture as incongruent with one's values and as unpleasant' (Silvia & Brown, 2007: 100). Freedman (2003: 65), discussing adult students' responses to visual culture, highlights the impact of students' expectations in informing their reactions to art, explaining that 'expectation is an emotional state tied to knowledge, often knowledge of form' and that 'people who see a work of art that is apparently unrelated to anything they have seen before might respond as if it is threatening'. Future analysis of the Making Sense of the Arts survey data will therefore explore in more detail possible correlations between students' responses to the scales 'Worth Studying-Not Worth Studying', 'Offensive-Inoffensive', 'Comforting-Disturbing', 'Repulsive-Attractive' and 'Unpleasant-Pleasant' and whether any correlations appear to be linked with students' age and/or gender. The link between students' expectations and the form of artworks which they find to be unpalatable will also be explored in interview.

Looking at pedagogy – 'The Study Diamond'

Some of the most positive student comments referred to the pedagogical approach featuring in Making Sense of the Arts and, more specifically, a meta-cognitive framework named the Study Diamond (see Figure 3) which is used to guide students' learning within the disciplines of poetry, history and art history. Throughout the course students are prompted to build their interpretations of humanities texts by making links between the four points of the Study Diamond, namely:

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Techniques (the form of a text)

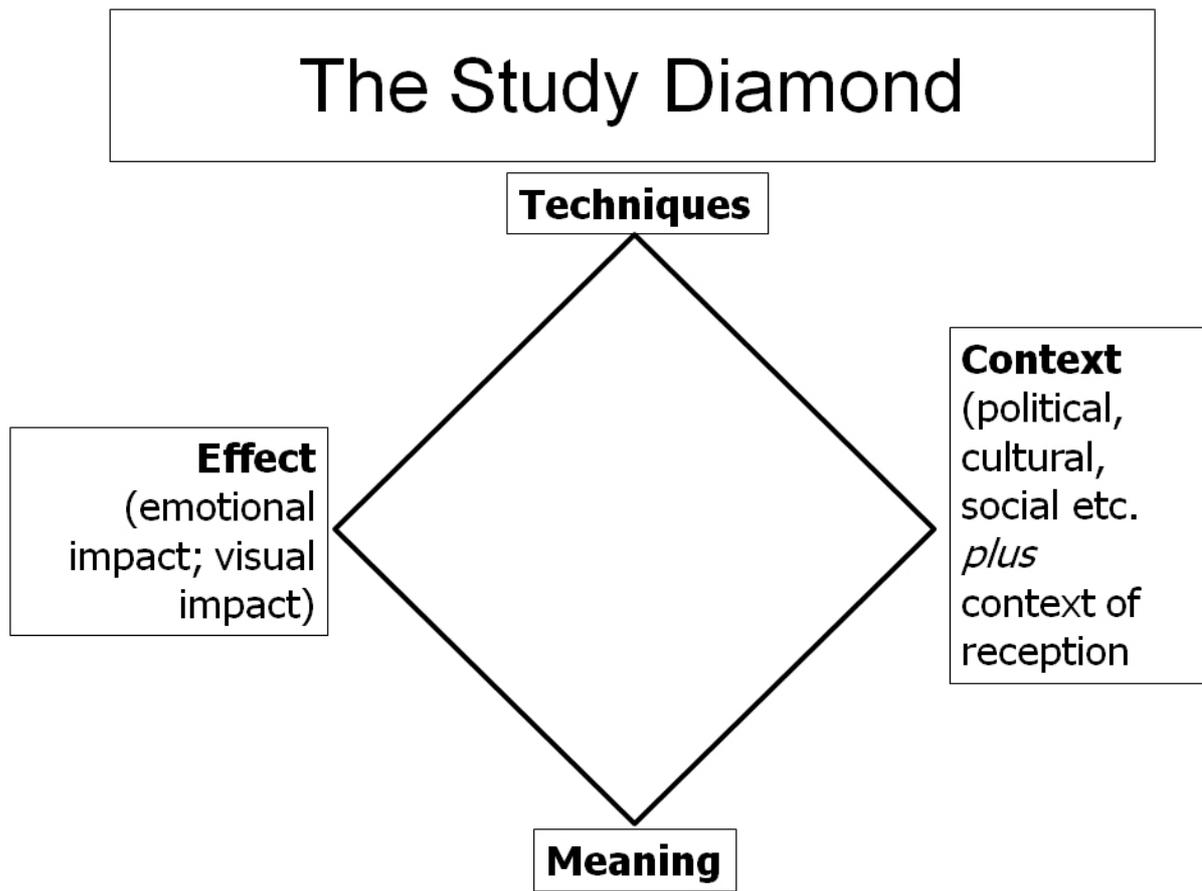
Effect (its emotional impact)

Meaning (the apparent connotation(s) of a text)

Context (including reflexive consideration of students' own subjective context).

While conceived in its current format by the 'Making Sense of the Arts' course authors, the Study Diamond has a solid ancestry in cognitive and pedagogical theory, providing a framework within which disparate artworks can be analyzed and then compared. Potentially, a meta-cognitive framework such as the Study Diamond can also facilitate students' learning by 'slowing down their looking' (Perkins, 1994; cited in Efland, 2002: 118), prompting them to take more time to look for relevant details and, as suggested by student questionnaire responses, can counteract the effects of Koroscik's (1982; 1990; 1996) 'conservative tendencies' (mentioned earlier).

Figure 4: The Study Diamond



Making Sense of the Arts co-author and Study Diamond co-designer Tim Baugh explains that:

As a tool for learners and teachers the Study Diamond provides a range of techniques aimed at raising awareness of the need to view reflective and analytical processes as inseparably linked in successful learning and teaching. One main area of focus is the balanced and dynamic integration of students' personal responses, views and perspectives with the views of apparent 'experts' and with those of their peers, especially those views and responses differing from their own. This, in turn, allows students to address the issue of subjectivity as a partial explanation for the multiplicity of meanings offered by any particular text. (Baugh, 2008)

Charman and Ross (2006: 30), addressing the challenges posed by the process of interpreting contemporary visual art confirm the value of meta-cognitive frameworks, arguing that:

Approaching the process of interpretation with a toolkit of thinking skills is particularly useful with regard to contemporary visual art, in which meanings can be contradictory, multiple and are certainly open-ended and unstable. In the light of such open-endedness, teaching the skills of interpretation benefits from a structured approach and method.

The Study Diamond was almost unanimously seen as a positive impact on students' study of art history, with 82.2% of students stating that it had a 'Very Positive' (44.8%) or 'Positive' (37.4%) impact on their studies. Students' comments were illuminating:

Working with the study diamond made me approach the artworks in a positive and inquisitive manner and so I derived much more benefit from the study than I would have done without it.

The art history wasn't as intimidating as I had expected once I got into it. The study diamond was worth the entry price. I will use that for everything from now on - genius.

The study diamond gives a framework to study when it might have been difficult to know quite how or where to start.

The course actually opened up art to me and the study diamond has provided me with a really useful means of viewing art at a personal level.

The next research phase will include further exploration of the impact of the Study Diamond on students' learning, through interviews with students and through analysis of their writing in response to the course activities and assignments.

What Next?

The data collected thus far appears to give a clear indication that some Making Sense of the Arts students continue to feel negatively about contemporary art after studying the course, bemoaning (amongst other things) its ugliness, its offensive subject matter and artists' apparent lack of skill. Silvia and Brown (2007) point out that 'essentially no

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research has been done on negative responses to art'. Their own application of the appraisal model of aesthetic emotions (see Lazarus, 1991; Roseman & Smith, 2001; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003 and Silvia, 2005) to anger and disgust in response to visual art is a recent exception, exploring both how negative aesthetic emotions happen and how similar negative emotions differ from each other. The next stage of the 'Making Sense of the Arts' research project will therefore use semi-structured interviews and analysis of students' writing to further explore the implications of Silvia and Brown's work (and other research into appraisal theories of emotion) in informing a better understanding of the barriers to learning faced by adult students of the visual arts and the ways in which they might be minimised. Pedagogy-related issues will be a particular focus, for example the significance of meta-cognitive frameworks such as the Study Diamond in offering students a way of making sense of their negative emotions and of integrating them with formal and contextual analysis and the consideration of others' perspectives to achieve a considered and well-argued interpretation of any artwork they might encounter. More extensive statistical analysis of the survey data collected from the two cohorts of 'Making Sense of the Arts' students will also take place, including multilevel modelling intended to help identify the relationship between students' emotional reactions to canonical and non-canonical, contemporary and non-contemporary art, their feelings about its aesthetic properties, and their views about whether such art is worth studying.

The next stage of the 'Making Sense of the Arts' research project will also explore the possibility that some adult students' value judgements about the worth of canonical non-contemporary art (and the worthlessness of contemporary art) might prevent them from any meaningful engagement with the latter, irrespective of the pedagogical context within which it is presented. Art educator Tom Gretton (2003) addresses this possibility, observing that although 'high culture' is often seen as 'reproducing not inspiring ideals and transcendent values, but ethnocentricity, patriarchy, and the norms of bourgeois individualism' (Gretton, 2003: 179) the canon continues to be reproduced. Teachers therefore have two choices, he suggests: to 'join...those who denounce and reject the canon' or to 'accept that its definition and reproduction meets some powerful cultural needs...and find acceptable ways of dealing with it' (Gretton, 2003: 179). Gretton proposes that the latter is preferable and that 'engagement with a loose canon can produce relevant knowledge, transferable understanding and cultural empowerment' (Gretton, 2003: 183), explaining that 'as students 'begin to feel some sort of cognitive and cultural power over the objects they study, they will develop a sense that the canon and its values belong to them, are theirs to play with as they see fit' (Gretton, 2003: 186).

Hopefully the '[Making Sense of the Arts' research will reach some useful conclusions about whether Gretton's views can be reconciled with those of art museum educator Melinda Mayer (2008: 77), who declares that 'when we teach with contemporary art, the potential is present for learning that is centred not in the classroom, but in all the worlds beyond it and students' efforts to negotiate their relationship to those worlds. What could be more relevant?' Above all, it is hoped that the project will contribute to knowledge about the ways in which higher education might achieve an arts curriculum which is 'transformative', (Banks, 2001); 'empowering' (Gay, 2000) and 'emancipatory', resulting in 'better understanding of interconnections among individual, local, national, ethnic, global and human identities; and acceptance of knowledge as something to be continuously shared, critiqued, revised and renewed' (Gay, 2000: 35) – an arts curriculum

in which both empathy and alienation in response to visual art can be reconciled in the interests of educational inclusion.

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