

Από το βιβλίο σου *Εκπαιδευτική ιδέα*
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I Traditional forms of teaching and learning based on textual forms of representation and rational thought may limit how we perceive our world. Artistic forms of expression and their implications for adult education are discussed.

Knowledge Construction as Contested Terrain: Adult Learning Through Artistic Expression

Randee Lipson Lawrence

On a recent trip to Santa Fe, I took the opportunity to visit the Awakenings Museum. It features just one exhibit, an eleven-thousand-square-foot space covered floor to ceiling with the work of the French painter Jean-Claude Gauguin. The exhibit depicts Gauguin's spiritual connection to the life and influence of Jesus Christ. Although not a Christian, I was nevertheless deeply moved by the bold colors and powerful imagery. This artistic rendering affected me in a way that reading or hearing about Christian theology never could.

Artistic forms of expression extend the boundaries of how we come to know, by honoring multiple intelligences and indigenous knowledge. Artistic expression broadens cultural perspectives by allowing and honoring diverse ways of knowing and learning. Making space for creative expression in the adult education classroom and other learning communities helps learners uncover hidden knowledge that cannot easily be expressed in words. It opens up opportunities for adult learners to explore phenomena holistically, naturally, and creatively, thus deepening understanding of self and the world.

The term *art* as used throughout this chapter refers to all forms of artistic expression: poetry, drama, dance, literature, music, and all forms of visual art. The chapter considers both the aesthetics of art created by others and art created by students as part of the learning experience.

Limitations of Traditional Ways of Constructing Knowledge in Adult and Higher Education

Cognitive knowing has dominated the adult education classroom, where the curriculum typically emphasizes transmission of knowledge through cultural reproduction (Greene, 1995). We prize reading, writing, and intellectual discourse. The intent of this chapter is not to suggest that these forms of teaching and learning are inherently wrong; they draw on only part of our human potential. Expression through spoken or written language can be a limitation (Lawrence and Mealman, 2001). When we open up intellectual space to incorporate other ways of knowing into our teaching practice, as expressed through metaphor, dance, poetry, visual art, or dramatic expression, we draw on the affective, somatic, and spiritual domains. Participants can more fully express what they know. Barone and Eisner (1997), pioneers in the area of arts-based research, agree that rationalist modes of inquiry have served to suppress artistic modes of expression. If we insist that people put their ideas into words, what gets communicated is often partial or not expressed at all (Lawrence and Mealman, 2001).

Many educators, particularly those in formal education settings, are reluctant to encourage artistic forms of expression in their classrooms because they are themselves unfamiliar, and thus uncomfortable, with the affective dimensions of knowledge production. The question of evaluation often comes up. How does one assess learning from a painting or musical composition? I have found that engaging students as partners in the evaluation process is an essential component in evaluating nonrational work.

As a final integrative project at the completion of her master's program in adult education, one of my students created a quilt. Though it was beautifully crafted, viewing the quilt alone did not give me enough insight into the student's learning process. But as we sat together and she explained how the panels, colors, and symbols represented the building blocks of her learning, I was able to more clearly see and assess her learning. Spoken language is not always necessary to understand art (indeed, it seems almost paradoxical), but discussion can sometimes assist educators in the evaluation process, enabling their students to make use of these creative forms of expressing knowledge.

London (1989) believes that human intelligence lies above and below the conscious level. To know, we need to value and acknowledge the unknown. Adopting this unknowing state of mind opens us up to more creative possibilities; "a state of Not Knowing allows us greater facility in rearranging what we know into new configurations and definitions of reality" (p. 81). Artistic expression is a way of tapping into this unknown region.

Art as Indigenous Knowledge

We often hear it expressed that art is a universal language. One need not understand Japanese to appreciate the delicate brush strokes of Japanese

watercolor. The bold colors of Diego Rivera speak to us whether our native language is Spanish, English, or Swahili. CD stores in the United States now have a category called world music, which includes native music from a variety of countries. Every culture and every tradition from earliest civilization to the present has created art, music, theater, poetry, and dance.

Eisner (1972) offered an "essentialist justification" (p. 2) for teaching art in schools. Although recognizing that art education serves to meet the needs of students and society, Eisner asserts that art is also indigenous unto itself. Art makes contributions to human society that are unique and cannot be duplicated by any other means. Art can also be a means to overcome the literacy barrier. McNeal (1997), who worked with an Inuit population in Western Canada, used films and tapes of cultural elders depicting indigenous history and culture to help reach her adult literacy students.

Our earliest ways of knowing are preverbal (Allen, 1995). Children naturally and spontaneously express themselves through singing, dancing, drawing, or acting out (pretending), often before they learn to read and write and sometimes even before they acquire a spoken language. At some point, this natural ability is thwarted. It may happen as we go to school and are told by the teacher that trees can't be blue, or that we must color inside the lines. We are told that our acting out is causing a disturbance. We are told that our singing voice is not in tune, so we stop singing. Our natural inclination can also be stifled by gender roles and expectations. When I was in the fourth grade and we had the opportunity to study a musical instrument in school, I was told that the saxophone was a "boy's instrument" and was encouraged to play the flute or violin. I did not join band that year, or ever. Is it any wonder then that by the time learners reach adulthood they are often reluctant to participate in artistic types of activity? As London (1989) expresses it, we have turned away from our natural ability to create as we learned to become embarrassed: "We have learned to feel so inept and disenfranchised from our own visual expressions that we simply cease doing it altogether" (p. xiii). Yet, as the chapters in this volume show, artistic expression is often the very medium that enables adult learning to occur.

Learning from Diverse Cultural Perspectives Through Art

As we recognize and appreciate that art is indigenous to all cultures, we can view it as a means to learn about diverse cultures and cultural perspectives. This understanding can assist us in helping our diverse learners get to know one another (see Lems in Chapter Two of this volume). We can also use the arts as a way to promote understanding of cultural perspectives that are not present within the learning group. We are all constrained by our positionality to a certain extent. We view the world through our race, gender, class, and ethnic identities.