

ADEL
Lesson Concept
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#2291425

Group Zine-Making Workshop



Proposal

The series of workshops I propose is intended for a group of students in grade 11 or 12, though can be adapted for high school students, middle school students, and adults, either within or outside of a traditional school context and environment. The series of workshops could occur within the context of a typical TDSB high school, or at a youth centre, rec centre, or studio space with computer access. The collaborative, involved format of the workshops would occur in multiple classroom sessions (preferably around 10-12 sessions of 2-3 hours each), to allow students to learn both about how to produce a

zine, but also to work collaboratively with one another. I propose to facilitate a space in which a group of students comes together to create a zine that comments on things they would like to change about the world they live in, and social justice topics of varying stripes. The zine would be a message from a new generation of youth to all people (particularly those in their communities), ideally communicating hopes and dreams for change, innovative ideas, and reflections on spaces for improvement. The zine would be prepared by students, designed by students, and photocopied and stapled by students. Due to these cheap methods of production, zines could be distributed for free both online and within the community, at rec centres and libraries. The zine should communicate the feelings of the students on the world they live in, and will provide them with agency and the means by which to distribute their voices in a society that often writes them off because of their youth. In giving students choice in how they would like to participate in the zine's production, and what content they would like to create, I hope to encourage them to look to their own lives for inspiration, to make the project relevant to their interests and daily experiences. This workshop is inspired by my love of design and my wish to create a pre-university space in which design education occurs. I am also influenced by my pedagogical inclinations towards activism and revolution through learning and teaching.

General & Rationale

This multi-session workshop is intended to empower students with the knowledge that they have the agency with which to express themselves, create something, and disseminate it into the larger context of their communities. The low cost and immediacy made possible by the zine format causes the results of students' efforts to be immediately

felt. Though the setting could be a class offered at any TDSB high school, it would also be appropriate as a semester-long weekend workshop youth take for fun and to hone their skills, or as a week-long intensive in the summer. The workshop would also be appropriate for at-risk youth who feel like their voices are not heard, and could be provided to a TDSB school as an extracurricular activity provided free of charge as an act of community service.

I have created self-published small-run editions of zines, journals, and books for the past five years. My practice involves the integration of writing, illustration, layout design, publication design, print production, typography, and bookbinding. I am also well-versed in and passionate about social justice topics, and the potential for zines as an activist method of reclaiming the means of production and giving agency to those who do not have it. I have been growing my zine collection for a few years now and have a large collection to show students for inspiration – a wide variety of art zines, comics, and political zines. On a recent trip to NYC I went to the Feminist Zine Fair, the Brooklyn Art Library (which houses The Sketchbook Project) the zine library at ABC No Rio, and the zine library at Barnard College at Columbia University. I have also participated in art shows and zine/comic/craft fairs, and will be able to bring all of that knowledge and experience to my teaching, to enrich the classroom environment. As a designer, artist, and activist, I am uniquely situated in my multiplicity of perspectives in offering students advice, feedback, and discipline-based skills pertaining to the creation of their class zine. I have also read extensively on the politics of DIY art and design, and would be able to place the students' creation in a larger theoretical context which would make their work not only fun but meaningful.

I want to facilitate a workshop of this nature to inspire youth to create, and to express themselves and what they are experiencing. I want them to know that their voices matter, to embrace that fact, and to see that in action in the 'real world' rather than simply within the confines of a school environment. Through encouraging students to exercise their agency and spread their voices, the students end up encouraging others to think about the world they live in. I hope that when other youth stumble upon the zine at libraries or rec centres, they, too, will feel empowered, and like they can sit down, make something, and send it out into the world. Art education, as I have learned in my engagement with the ADEL class, often falls short of teaching students how to spread their work and their ideas. As a designer who has always had an entrepreneurial spirit, I would like to infuse this go-get-'em know-how into high school students who are already comfortable in the typical art education framework which involves endless portraiture or landscapes. I would like to encourage students not to think of art as stale and belonging only on gallery walls, but as something that lives, that changes, that speaks, that acts as a form of outreach both for viewer and creator.

Materials needed to successfully facilitate this workshop would be easy access to a photocopier, one professional quality EPSON scanner, and from 2-6 Apple computers with Adobe Creative Suite installed. Ideally some funding (either via grants or via classroom materials fees) would be obtained for photocopies and staples. The photocopying shop I use charges \$0.06 per double-sided copy – so a zine that consists of 25 8 ½ x 11 pages (100 pages folded) would cost \$1.50 to photocopy, plus tax. Staples would likely cost roughly 10 cents per zine.

Curricular Orientation

This workshop would likely be best suited to high school students in grades 11 and 12. They would be mature enough to take the project seriously, and if they are interested in art and design, might be at the point in their lives when they are starting to think seriously about careers, jobs, colleges, and universities, and where they see their lives going. Design is not often a facet of the creative industries that high school students are exposed to, and this workshop would remedy that glaring absence. It could also be adopted to younger high school students and adults, with some changes in terms of the subject matter and project (for adults, it might be more fun to do both a class zine *and* individual zines). High school is the time when many students run the risk of giving up on their ambitions, of feeling lost and listless because they aren't sure what they want to do with their lives and if that decision is pointless in the long run anyway. In this workshop I would like to infuse students with the knowledge that what they do matters, and that their voices can be heard.

Due to its focus on social justice, activism, social reconstruction, and personal relevancy, I would be particularly keen to facilitate this workshop in an environment in which underprivileged, at-risk, and/or marginalized students have access to the workshop. I am particularly interested in working with students of colour, students who are financially disadvantaged, queer/trans* students, differently mentally and physically dis/abled students, and students of varied cultural backgrounds. These students in particular are at a high risk of not gaining important qualities such as self-assurance and confidence, and belief in the importance of one's own voice and agency. I would like to encourage these students to reflect on their experience in their community, and ask them

if perhaps it is the world in which they live that has something ‘wrong’ with it, not them. I would like to put a call out to various schools and community centres, ascertain which schools are interested and how they would like to proceed. I am equally comfortable facilitating this workshop as a part of the TDSB, or as something extracurricular – it all depends on if schools are interested in building mutually beneficial relationships in which their students could engage in such a workshop.

Objectives

In addition to the social, cultural, and personal goals outlined above, I would like the students to have a working knowledge of zines, independent publishing, layout creation via InDesign, preparing analog scanned documents for print on a digital platform, principles of page imposition, multiple forms of very simple bookbinding (single-signature, accordion, and stab-binding), knowledge of how to distribute one’s zines, and knowledge of zine libraries, fairs, and distros in Toronto and Ontario. They will also learn how to scan their artwork, basic Adobe Photoshop skills, basic Adobe Illustrator skills, basic principles of strategic branding and strategic marketing through the understanding of one’s audience. Since students will have created a finished product at the class’ conclusion, students will emerge from the experience with the knowledge that they have the ability to reach out to their communities in concrete ways.



Pedagogy Praxis

In teaching this workshop, I will constantly ask the students to reflect on themselves, their lives, their identities, and other intersections that concern social justice and inequality. All classes will be structured in a way that all students can see one another during presentations and all group discussions; students will sit in a circle either around a table or on the floor when the class does not consist of open studio time. By doing this, I aim to create a vulnerable, egalitarian, safe space in which students feel comfortable, valued, and respected by one another as well as by their instructor. Though I aim to teach students discipline-based skills, it is vital to the pedagogy of the class that students perceive me as being on the same playing field as they are. In setting up the non-hierarchical circle environment, I am letting the students know that they are valued, and that I have as much to learn from them as they do from me. I hope that this will result in a respectful, safe space in which students respect one another, and in which they feel

comfortable being honest, candid, and exploratory – unafraid to confront complex issues and ask hard questions, and learn that they don't always need to have all of the answers. In my experience as a student, the arrangement of a classroom in a circular format helps facilitate a classroom in which “peer as mentor and teacher as facilitator” (Clark, 81) are commonplace and can lead to enriching opportunities for learning, conversation, understanding, and empowerment. I believe the circle structure is also important because “learning involves not just the addition of new material but constant reorganization of what is already known. This process itself increases the capacity to learn” (Alexander, 35-37). Many students will likely never have had class in a circular configuration, and will have assumed that having rows facing the front of the classroom is the only manner in which to conduct a class. Establishing that the class is one which will challenge conventions can be done with the simple act of having students sit in a circle.

In the first session, we will discuss the orientation of the room. Why are we sitting in a circle? Does anyone have any ideas? How does it differ from a traditional classroom space? How is it the same? How does that impact you as students? I will then ask the students to get in groups of three – preferably with someone they have never met before. The students are to ask each other why they are interested in the course, and learn about one another. After seven minutes, students will return to the larger circle and students will introduce one another.

After introductions, I will briefly speak about zines and what they are by opening the discussion with a question. What is a zine? What isn't? The discussion will bring up aesthetics, means of production (is it photocopied? Hand-bound?) and where one draws the line between a small-press book and a zine. Isn't a limited run of artist books really

just an expensive, elaborate edition of zines? Why? Why not? What are the similarities and differences between various forms – artist books, zines, and magazines? Where does one start and the other end? Once this discussion is in an appropriate state of ambiguity (led by the students), I will share a variety of zines for the students to look at, as examples and inspiration for what we will be doing in the remainder of the workshop, so students can see the possibilities available to them. Students will each be given one or two zines to look over, and to analyze in small groups (they will be encouraged to work with completely new people this time – I would like this class to be a space where students feel comfortable going up to one another and fostering a sort of community), and then as a larger class. Some questions (open-ended, to encourage reflection and deeper thought rather than simple yes/no answers) might include: Before you open the zine, what does the cover tell you about what might be inside? After taking a look at it, what is the subject matter of the zine? What message does the zine communicate? What does this zine tell you about the person who made it? What kind of community might they live in? What makes you draw those conclusions? In what ways do you identify with this zine? In what ways don't you?

After this discussion, we will take a short break. I will then facilitate a class discussion on social justice and activism, and the role of art and design in fighting larger struggles. I will then show a 10-15 minute slideshow of the work of various artists and designers to whom activism and social justice issues are an integral aspect of their creative practice (such works might include Banksy's graffiti, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Chester Brown's *Paying For It*, all of Joe Sacco's comics journalism, various anonymous culture jammers, propaganda posters, and the graphic design of the

Deterritorial Support Group). I will facilitate a conversation about the artists' work that is shown, and ask similar questions to those I posed regarding the zines. I will ask students what emotional response they get out of the works, what the works communicate to them, and why they feel the works were created. Students will then each be given a small sheet of paper. On one side, students will write something they love about their community. On the other side, students will be asked to write something they don't like and/or wish they could change or positively influence. All contributions are anonymous. After everyone is finished writing, the papers are shuffled, and each student takes turns picking one sheet of paper from a hat and reading aloud what is written on both sides. After each paper has been read, students are encouraged to comment on any of the issues raised by their peers, and are free to elaborate upon what they wrote down on their sheet of paper, if they feel comfortable. Depending on how receptive students are to the class discussion, it could continue, or if students are feeling shy on the first day of class and not comfortable enough to talk with one another candidly yet, I will ask the students to do a freewrite on their chosen issue for 15 minutes, not taking their pencil off their notebooks at all in that entire time, other than to turn the page. This will encourage students to express their thoughts and will give them experience in stream-of-consciousness creation, which is completely unconcerned with something's appearance or poetic qualities. This exercise will just be for them, and will not be shared, and they will be told this before they begin. For the next class, students will be given homework: Part One: What don't you like about your school? If you could change anything, what would it be? Come prepared to next class ready to share your thoughts. Part Two: Bring in some work created by your favourite artist. What is it about their artwork speaks to you? What inspires you about

what they do that you would like to incorporate into the way you approach your own art making?

In terms of method, I am very interested in the personal relevancy framework of pedagogy and believe that students are most enriched when they are given the freedom to explore their own personal interests and learn at the same time; often, when one is passionate about learning something, school doesn't have the typical staleness that a lot of high school students associate with school as a whole. I would like the workshop to be primarily driven by the interests and concerns of the students. The zine is not for me, it is for them, and if they don't find it an empowering, enriching experience, there is no point in facilitating such a class. Asking the students for feedback on their interests and concerns early on in the class is my way of, as Stuhr suggests in Curriculum Guidelines for the Multicultural Art Classroom, doing preliminary research before constructing a specific curricula (20). My lesson plan for the course is open enough so that whatever students' concerns are, they can and will be accommodated and welcomed within the classroom space, as the emphasis is on the individual. This is because, as Stuhr writes, "The learning that takes place... must be relevant to the students' own cultural artistic experiences" (24).

In later classes, students will learn skills outlined under the Objectives header, in a similar manner of teaching. Students will also be taken on field trips to zine libraries in the city (such as the Tranzac zine library, the OCADU zine library, and the Xpace zine library). I also aim to organize artist talks or studio visits with artists who work predominantly in zines, comics, and activist art and design practices.

Outcomes

Students will learn how to work together in groups in order to successfully create a complete final product (a class zine). Students will learn the importance of compromise and problem-solving in large groups – unavoidable with the creation of a publication by a large group of individuals), navigate deadlines, and work together to see their efforts result in Students will learn to think critically about the world and their place in it, and create an artwork (visual or written) that communicates a strong political message. Their original artwork and writing will be published in the class zine and shared with their community. Student work will be evaluated on the basis of successful problem-solving and teamwork, inclusion and respect for their peers, and critically reflecting upon issues of social justice and activism and translating that into an artwork which clearly communicates its message. Both conceptual and technical skill will be evaluated, and the growth of a student over the course of the workshop will be greatly taken into consideration. An aspect of evaluation will also include a reflection on the class and what they got out of it, and where they would like to take their practice (or not take their practice) in the future as a result of the course's influence (or lack thereof).

Reflection

My belief in this project was renewed in my last teaching session with Catherine at the AGO. It was so inspiring to test some of these ideas out and ask the students to really think critically about social justice issues. Their critical thought and ability to translate their criticisms and observations into complex, hard-hitting artwork (in the time span of 40 minutes and a few simple office supplies) was inspiring, and seeing their

dedication and interest in the project was fantastic. One thing I noticed about the final presentations of these works by the students who created them was that there was no need to memorize what they were going to say – there was no need to, they already held the subject matter close to their hearts and within their minds. In this workshop I am offering a contribution to art education by emphasizing that art is not only something that lives within art galleries, and that design is not limited to the corporate – it can be personal, too! This is particularly important, since at the high school level there is little to no design education, and the art education which exists is often drab (even to art people) and out of touch with contemporary art practice. I wish to place design and art in the context of a greater global environment in which they are empowered to make their ideas sing rather than sit on shelves, unused. (Or, in the case of encouraging my students submit to zine libraries – sitting on shelves to be used and experienced often!)

