

**Where Lived Experience Resides in Art Education:
A Painting and Pedagogical Collaboration with Mayan Artists**

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Running Head:

Where Lived Experience Resides

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Abstract

This mentorship project between three artist-teachers from different cultures reveals insights into the transmission of cross-cultural painting pedagogy.

A collaborative ethnographic study is described that explores the perspective of a North-American painter, the author-researcher, participating in a mentorship learning experience with a Mayan Tzutuhil painter, Pedro Rafael Gonzalez Chavajay, and a Mayan Kaqchikel painter, Paula Nicho Cumez. The painting and pedagogical collaboration examines the philosophy and methods underlying artistic studio practice and pedagogy and took place in a non-formal learning context in which artwork was made in the home and surrounding community. The objective of this project was to develop insights into indigenous pedagogy that has implications for transformative curricula for the art experience of pre-service art educators. *Entry through mentorship* is presented as an investigative strategy that can contribute to the larger body of cross-cultural research in art education in general, and studio-led art learning in particular.

A Problem of Perspective

My arts experiences in high school, and later in art school, reflected a kind of barrenness of disengaged learning in which I felt neither my personal nor cultural history, gender, interests or passions were very much considered. As a female artist, student, and teacher whose personal needs were not answered, I was seeking alternative ways to teach and study art. This led to the exploration of indigenous artistic living traditions as a means for understanding a more holistic process for teaching art. Upon encountering two Mayan movements where painting was taught out of artists' studios in a situated learning context, I wondered if any of the practices informing such pedagogical models with their curricular contents might serve as means to broaden art teaching traditions in higher education. As the teaching and learning of art is individually directed, yet culturally shaped, I believed that there was merit in seeking instruction in art in two Mayan indigenous cultures where conversations, and collaborations among artists might take place. Ecker (1998) states, "cross cultural aesthetic inquiry requires participation in artistic activity of another culture for the purpose of understanding it on its own terms" (p. 7). I was hoping that this investigation into the ideas and structures that inform Mayan painting and pedagogical practices might broaden Eurocentric art pedagogy and curricula. This study therefore posed the general question, how is artistic knowledge transferred from a Mayan Indigenous artist to a non-Mayan artist? Further, what are the implications for the integration of Mayan ways of knowing into a studio art teaching context in higher education?

Several art educators have discussed the role of the art educator as ethnographer and issues of creating a truly multicultural education by immersing themselves in the cultures that they later seek to incorporate into teaching curricula (Ballengee Morris, 1995; 2002; Bresler, 1994; Desai, 2000; 2002; Garber, 1995). Yet, in the fields of art education and ethnography, the researcher too often maintains the “gaze” of outsider, examining “the other” (Behar, 1996; DiLeonardo, 1998; Lassiter, 1998; Rosaldo, 1993). It seems that artists are in a unique position to communicate cross-culturally, yet have they taken advantage of this as micro-ethnographic researchers?

Mentorship as collaborative ethnography attempts to respond to issues that have traditionally created false separations between ethnographers and “informants” prior to the inception of postcolonial approaches to ethnography (Lassiter, 1998; Lawless, 1992; 1993; B. Tedlock, 1991; D. Tedlock, 1983; Titon, 1988). It has as its core two assumptions: first, artistic language can transcend certain cultural boundaries; second, by forming an *artistic mentorship*, the teacher-student relationship creates a kind of “insidership” that is otherwise not possible to experience. I argue that apprenticeship/mentorship in an indigenous context is a method of inquiry, a conscious way to critically examine underlying theoretical principles and methodologies of ethnography. Furthermore, I propose that *entry* into a learning environment through the practice of art, which comprises a mentoring relationship between teacher and student, can foster a more complete understanding of another culture. *Entry* through trans-cultural art mentoring enables the student to retain information easily because teaching is both individualized and experiential.

A Problem of Practice

The history of North American studio art teaching traditions in higher education over the past century has been documented in some detail (Hubbard, 1963; Singerman, 1999). There is a tendency in higher education in the teaching of studio art and art education to teach primarily from a Euro-centric skills-based or formalist perspective which excludes female ways of knowing and culturally diverse pedagogical practices (Becker, 1996; Dunning, 1997; Hubbard, 1962; Pio, 1997). Many issues and questions arise. Why has the teaching of art been primarily skills-based, removing the artist-student from both personal narrative and cultural context? Does the studio teacher-as-expert paradigm that Singerman (1999) describes foster a mutually rewarding learning relationship between teacher and student?

According to Dunning (1998), most instructors were taught and, in turn, teach only one single artistic style. Perhaps they value several styles, “but most teach some variation of what they themselves do, or a variation of what they were taught” (p. 66). For Singerman, the field of visual art in higher education was taught as “...problem solving, basics and fundamentals” (1999, p. 20). In addition to uni-teaching styles, multiple cultures have not been included in studio-based curricula. If the artist is “both the object and the subject of university training” (Singerman, 1999, p. 213), then it stands to reason that the artist-teacher on the university level helps to shape the identity of the artist. Consequently, art educators need to give their students a broad sense of the world, helping them to become aware of wide cultural contexts. If students are offered “only one

version of what art is” (Becker, 1996, p. 103), then we limit the development and potential of our students to know their world in new ways.

Providing an inclusive art education curriculum is a critical challenge today. Indigenous cultures whose epistemologies are rooted in the interdependence of the human being and her/his environment form the basis for understanding a more holistic teaching philosophy (Kincheloe & Semali, 1999). My work in the areas of Mayan painting and teaching methods through mentoring dyads in Mayan art studios (Staikidis, 2004), exemplifies a culturally sensitive approach to the study of indigenous art making and the study of Mayan cultures on their own terms. Such studies can contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of indigenous artistic and pedagogical practices within the fields of Art and Art Education in the United States.

Perspective and Practice in Context

Because this study took place in two Mayan indigenous contexts, it is grounded in theoretical perspectives that have at their core the view that cognition is a mental and physical activity occurring within a sociocultural context (Vygotsky, 1978). Like Vygotsky, Jean Lave views individuals as participants in communities of practitioners where the mastery of knowledge and skill requires learners to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. Lave (1984; 1988; 1991; 1993) has done extensive work regarding the impact of informal learning on cognitive skills. Greenfield and Lave (1982) revealed the positive relationship between cognition and situated learning. Processes such as observational learning, trial-and-error learning, scaffolding and developmental task sequencing, verbalization and cooperative participation are discussed in their studies. They found that a variety of instructional

techniques exist in informal learning situations and that there is much pedagogical organization to learning that takes place in the context of daily activities. Rogoff (1990) conducted educational studies that involve learners within Mayan indigenous contexts and so her work was particularly relevant to this study. Rogoff sees individual efforts, sociocultural arrangements and involvement as inseparable, mutually embedded focuses of interest. She regards context as inseparable from human actions in cognitive activities or events. Rogoff promotes apprenticeship models as means for “active learning” within a community of people who “support, challenge, and guide novices as they increasingly participate in skilled, valued and sociocultural activity” (p. 39).

Sullivan (2004) takes the notion of situated learning directly to the artist’s studio. He presents a theoretical framework from which explanatory structures of knowledge can be drawn based on studio practice, where making and interpreting art create a foundation for “constructing theories of artistic knowing” (p. 795). Sullivan argues that the goal of art education research should be the production of “transformative knowledge,” and that art educational research should be grounded within the theories and practices that surround art making” (p. 800). Artworks are individually and culturally constructed forms and therefore can be used as sources of knowledge. Their surrounding contexts influence the cultural meanings within artworks. Therefore, art practice reflects cultural meanings and can enable researchers to understand the surrounding cultural contexts. Artworks are seen as communicative and political vehicles and research is conducted “through art” where researchers have the opportunity to “produce knowledge that can be acted upon” (p. 803). Because this study is rooted in the teaching-learning exchange that

takes place within Mayan artists' studios, the idea that research can be transformative inquiry is particularly useful.

Art Educators Cross Cultures

Several art educators discuss the issue of creating a truly multicultural education by putting themselves directly into the cultures that they seek to incorporate into teaching curricula. Garber (1995) argues that although many art educators work hard to expand the cultural basis of their curricula beyond Eurocentric traditions, without immersion into those cultures, efforts will “simplify and misrepresent other cultures and their artifacts” (p. 218). She advocates what she terms *border studies*- systems that incorporate two sets of reference codes operating simultaneously. Garber also refers to “nutrient experiences,” which comprise interactions with myriad aspects of the culture such as popular, folk, mass, spiritual, art; landscape and narrative mythologies, traditional stories of the culture, and issues of identity. Petrovich-Mwaniki (1990) also believes that teachers must “engage in and commit to significant transcultural experiences” (p. 236) that provide direct contact. Bresler (1994) examines the positive role of the art educator as ethnographer, which must “strive to balance “outside-inside” issues and interpretations” (p. 7). Stokrocki (1991) focuses on art pedagogical practices from a cross-cultural perspective stating that cross-cultural art settings reveal “changes, conflicts, and confluences” in traditional and modern values. Ballengee Morris (2002) explicitly argues for studying visual culture through various lenses: “appropriation, adaptation, influence, colonialism, and the business of art need to be explored along with the culture(s) and object(s)” (p. 15). She states that while educators do study art from other cultures, they often embody a “long ago and far away” attitude that confirms and perpetuates an

outdated perspective, rather than pertinent “people or issue driven exploration” (p.16). The studies mentioned indicate the need for art educators to play the role of ethnographers. But I propose that *entry* through the language of art, which results in a mentoring relationship between teacher and student, can foster an understanding that presents a more comprehensive approach to understanding art making processes as forms of cultural practice.

Transformative Curricular Models

In addition to art educators crossing borders as ways to give voice to multiple cultures in classrooms, an emphasis in multicultural education to implement transformative curricula in classrooms of higher education is advocated by Banks (1996) and others. Consequently it can be asked, how can curricula be modified in ways that penetrate the “invisible paradigm” that does not include multiple perspectives in the field of art education, but still remains at the center of art pedagogy? Mahalingam and McCarthy (2000) state that multiculturalism, when speaking of cultures as bounded, homogenized notions, can be used as a pedagogical device to unintentionally essentialize cultures. This occurs when “other” cultures are spoken of as discrete units, “the embodied experiences of marginalized groups should be understood in order to produce a shift in the conception of culture from that of a collection of aesthetic and folkloric objects and practices” (p. 5). A multicultural curriculum can be used as a platform for educational reform on a global level in which bounded notions of culture, including the notion of “white,” are challenged and constantly contested.

The literature is replete with interpretations of multicultural education that raise questions about how to teach and represent cultures of students within the classroom. Desai

(2003) categorizes multicultural art education as either “mainstream or social reconstructionist.” She contends that mainstream multicultural ideologies have at their core a cultural pluralism rooted in an “essentialist understanding of culture” (p. 148). These ideologies include: the human relations approach, exceptional and culturally different approach, and single group studies approach. In general, these approaches use the template of European experience to understand non-European groups. In speaking of multicultural art education curricula, Sleeter (1996) observes, “to my dismay, I found that the great majority of the materials conceptualized multicultural art as the study of folk art, around the world (and usually “long ago”)” (p. xvi). The “additive” approach in which previously neglected movements or styles are added to the traditional list of twentieth-century European art movements, broadens the curriculum without challenging “the Eurocentric, patriarchal, and exclusionary biases of the overall framework” (Cahan & Kocur, 1996, p. xx). Cahan and Kocur further state that in contrast the most effective approaches place the study of art into a broader, cultural, social, political and historical framework.

As previously mentioned, Kincheloe and Semali (1999) point out that because of its relational dynamics, indigenous knowledge is labeled holistic. Therefore, indigenous education as a microcosm of indigenous experience would treat the student as part of a greater cosmology, without dissecting that cosmology into pieces or units of knowledge. Kincheloe & Semali believe that an appreciation of indigenous knowledge “can inform and transform disciplinary curriculums from elementary schools to graduate studies” (p. 48). Within the context of the Mayan study reported here, pedagogy and curriculum are not separated into discrete categories such as form and content; rather, they are fused to become “teaching structures” that are holistic in nature. As researcher, I was mentored

by two Mayan painters in order to better understand artistic and teaching processes that reflect a holistic philosophy whose studio practices are immersed in an artistic living tradition. However, the purpose of this study is not to duplicate the field experience in the classrooms of higher education. The objective of this project was to develop insights into indigenous pedagogy in order to consider the implications for transformative curricula for the art studios of higher education and the learning setting for pre-service art education.

Decolonizing Methodologies

Ethnography has been subject to much reflection and criticism within the last half-century. Adapting apprenticeship-mentorship in an indigenous context as a method of inquiry was a conscious way for me as researcher, artist and student to examine my own positionality within the research process. Ethnographic practice now calls for the recognition of multidimensional dynamics of fieldwork, as well as emphasizing difficulties in interpretation that call for ethnographers to examine their roles in the production of knowledge. In the field of art education, Desai (2002) speaks of ethnography that focuses on discourse and practice dealing with particulars rather than generalizations that gives attention to the positionality of the ethnographer. Artistic mentoring as an ethnographic model creates a two-way relational dynamic in which the autobiography of the researcher is present at all times. The art lessons become interchanges within which skills in addition to transcultural viewpoints are exchanged.

Although qualitative inquiry formed the basis of this study, distinctions were made. Qualitative analysis emphasizes a constructivist notion of reality, interpretation, and a holistic approach to reality that is time and context bound rather than rule-oriented (Bresler, 1994; Lassiter, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Nevertheless, within the qualitative research paradigm, more “traditional” qualitative approaches have “silenced many groups marginalized and oppressed in society by making them the passive object of inquiry” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 4). Thus, this study attempted to incorporate and apply postmodern perspectives to qualitative research (Geertz, 1983; DiLeonardo, 1998; Lassiter, 1998; Sullivan, 2002; 2004) for they assume knowledge to be subjective, which necessitates that multiple questions be “dismantled and reframed” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 4). In addition, this study was based upon Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) inquiry model designed for researchers working in an indigenous context who are either indigenous or non-indigenous, and who share a concern for using research methods that are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

I used an ethnographic qualitative research design that incorporated a participant-observer model to describe a trans-cultural painting experience. This took place among three artists, primarily self-taught, including a Mayan male Tzutuhil artist, a female Kaqchikel painter and the author-researcher. Ethnographic research took place in the field and built upon the subjective experience of the three participants, thus seeking to provide a depth of understanding often not present in other approaches to research (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). In such a study the researcher’s role is to gain a “holistic” overview of the context under study; the researcher attempts to examine data based on her perceptions as well as those of the *consultants* (Lassiter, 1998) “from the inside” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 6). The study used multiple collection techniques so that data gathered one way was cross checked for accuracy with other data sources. As participant-observer, I received art lessons, conducted interviews, and wrote field observations. Visual artifacts - the paintings made during the course of study - served as visual field notes. This study

sought to use the participants' own constructs to frame definitions of art, spirituality, pedagogy, and other key constructs.

The adoption model of research, in which I lived with each indigenous family, enabled me as student/artist/researcher to participate in the daily lives of the collaborators (Tuhuwai-Smith, 1999). Reciprocity was part of the ethnographic process that ensured indigenous artists received benefit from the study itself (Crazy Bull, 1997). I consulted with indigenous artists as *experts* and teachers of Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel artistic processes, philosophy, and pedagogy. I studied under their tutelage in educational cycles designed by them where their expertise guided the research. These approaches created bridges of understanding rather than being invasive investigative practices.

Site and Participants

The sites for this study were two small towns, San Pedro La Laguna and San Juan de Comalapa in Guatemala. Within Guatemala, during the last several decades, a painting movement, largely men's, was born which is now in the process of expanding rapidly to include women painters. According to Joseph Johnston (1999), an art historian and collector of Mayan Tzutuhil paintings:

Tzutuhil painting is important because it is an art form, albeit of recent origin, of an ancient Indian culture which has survived to the present. The Mayans may have borrowed the technique of painting in oil, but the style of this art came from within their own culture with little influence from Western schools of art. It is a style entirely unique in the world of art (p. 2).

The Mayan Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel painters and their strategies for transmitting the teaching of art in the field take place in a non-formal setting for learning outside of a Euro-American context.

Painters Pedro Rafael Gonzalez Chavajay and Paula Nicho Cumez were the principal artists who collaborated with me in this study. In addition, other painters, either members of their families or members of the San Pedro/Comalapa painting communities, as well as their painting students, were interviewed and observed painting. Without exception, the sixteen artists interviewed in the study came from subsistence backgrounds where painting careers are pursued as a means to make a better living. Participants ranged in ages from twenty to fifty-six.

Data analysis began with a review of the original research questions and the data was then “scanned,” or reread (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 236) to get a sense of the emergent content themes. This study incorporated Miles and Huberman’s (1994) method for coding data, which used words or mnemonics that visually reminded me of original concepts. Interviews were coded using categories that corresponded to the field notes where appropriate. Each interview was consulted as a primary source for comparative analysis with the researcher’s observations and other interviews. Paintings were consulted as visual and cultural references examined by the Mayan artists and described in their words. Collaborative ethnography also took place. I brought my writings to the painters with whom I studied and they corroborated or disagreed with my perceptions; thus their views shaped the findings that were re-analyzed and re-stated, until meeting their approval. The effects these changes had upon my perceptions as a researcher and fellow artist were examined as well.

Results

Within Mayan cultures studied, art was discussed as a means for protecting, preserving and transmitting Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel traditions. For Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel painters, art making is seen as a vehicle to perpetuate culture. In the painting below, Paula Nicho Cumez depicts her cultural *traje* (traditional clothing) as her second skin. She has painted this image to “teach her children to feel proud of their Mayan ancestry and to never concede to dominant culture marginalization” (Paula Nicho Cumez, 2003).



Paula Nicho Cumez

My Second Skin

In such situated learning contexts, *relationship* is the cornerstone of teaching. From this relationship as their base, Mayan teaching processes extend to include collaboration, narrative as a foundation for art making, and a potential for decentralizing

the teacher-as-expert model. Lived experiences and a holistic paradigm underlay the teaching of skills.

Mentoring as *Relationship*

“A student has the same spiritual aspect as the teacher. The student must feel it too if I feel it as the teacher. *We must feel it.*” (Pedro Rafael Gonzalez Chavajay, 2002)

The mentoring relationship is at the core of teaching practice. Relationships between mother and child, father and son, siblings, teachers and students, are the primary shapers in all fields of Mayan education. For the cultural outsider, the first objective within the mentoring dyads for both mentors was to establish friendship and trust as the foundations for teaching.

The influence of these particular artistic mentoring relationships erodes traditional paradigms of cultural insider/outsider. When transference of knowledge is highly personalized, cultural bridges are formed through a unique vehicle – artistic language. Qualifiers such as insider or outsider became positive means for communicating new ideas rooted in curiosity and the exchange of information, rather than walls that intervene to prevent understanding. Cultural differences become conduits. Mentoring across cultures has the potential for communicating unique aspects of cultural ways of knowing.

Mentorship as *Form*

As a newcomer to Mayan painting, I had to prove myself via color, composition, imitation, drawing ability, and memory retention. Although the iconography was different from my own, the materials were familiar, the artistic language shared. The artistic processes were exploratory; the teaching relationships were rooted in art making and a mutual objective; thus, the transactions, although investigative, were disassociated

from qualities of ethnographic approaches that might be one-sided and distant. Additionally, the study took place in artists' studios, those places that are private with their own idiosyncratic happenings. For Mayan painters, painting studios are little laboratories, not generally shared, except when a new student becomes a part of the teacher's world for a temporary time. Making art in the artist's studio established a unique bond within mentoring dyads that fostered trans-cultural communication.

In the ethnographic study, *Kiowa Song*, Lassiter (1998) documents his experiences as a cultural outsider mentored in the art of Kiowa singing. Lassiter also views artistic language as a vehicle for communicating across and through cultures. Through apprenticeship, cultural differences are explored without becoming oppressive to either culture involved in an artistic exchange. I began to understand the specific visual artistic language embedded within Mayan pedagogical practices through *participation* in the learning process. In this way, I was able to take a long look at the biases I walked in with as an educator, which were partially dismantled by the time I left. Additionally, mentors were influenced by my individual and cultural styles. Therefore, the mentoring relationship became a vehicle that fostered "border crossings" (Garber, 1995).

Collaboration and Decentralized Teaching

In Mayan cultures, teaching painting is part of a philosophy that embraces collective enterprise. Paula Nicho Cumez taught me to paint as we worked together on the same canvas. The curriculum was partially negotiated as we decided which oratory or theme would be the main idea of our painting, but all subject matter came out of her cultural orientation as both female and Mayan. Two artists working on the same canvas

inspired thought for formal classroom settings which are particularly conducive to peer tutoring and collaborative approaches to learning.

Another teaching strategy was the novice structure that developed as students of Pedro Rafael went on to become established painters in their own right. They systematically took newcomers under their wings to give them tidbits of information fostering advancement through personalized instruction. This is reflective of a situated learning context where teaching becomes decentralized over time as it expands outward toward the larger community through one-to-one relationships based on guided participation. Novices take responsibility for teaching newcomers, thus forming their own painting lineages that derive from the mentor. A decentralized teaching structure seems particularly appropriate for art studios where multi-leveled sharing and learning takes place visually and verbally.

Life as Text

When artistic skills are taught within a situated learning context, they are not removed from lived experiences. Daily life and art making are integrated so that artistic acts are not considered lone ideas taking form in isolated places. The Mayan artists taught from their individual painting processes and they derived ideas for paintings from their surrounding communities, with their regional dress, customs and social practices. It was life as text rather than textbook as life. Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel visual culture was the resource for teaching painting. At one point in my studies, I noted:

All of Pedro Rafael's students mentioned that he focused on teaching through living. We took lots of outings. In later lessons he would refer back to each outing as a teaching resource, thus it became a guide for the studio

lessons, analogous to a textbook in a North American classroom. In Mayan pedagogy, skills form the bridge between the artist and his or her visual narrative. One learns how to use color to convey emotion or traditional clothing from a particular cultural region, both of which have personal meaning for the artist creating the works. Depth of field is taught when it is necessary to depict the volcanoes as distant from the coast, and the trees as closer, both of which exist to tell a story relating to the cultural landscapes, meanings and values of each artist.



Pedro Rafael Gonzalez Chavajay *Coffee Harvest*

Discussion

Certain distinctions among concepts such as observation, curriculum and pedagogy became apparent as I studied with Mayan mentors. I use the term “Imagined Realism” as a descriptor for the styles of Mayan Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel painting that I observed. The artists consider themselves realists whose responsibility it is to create art

works that will serve as accurate cultural referents for future generations. Yet, drawing or painting from observation of nature holds no place in Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel art making. Observation, therefore, becomes visceral rather than mimetic. Additionally, pedagogy and curriculum are not separated into discrete categories in Mayan art studios as sites for learning.

Conceptual Distinctions: Observation

For a cultural outsider, like me, who was raised on art education that presented rendering from observation as *the* foundation for “capturing reality,” notions and definitions of observation were thrown into serious debate. In Mayan terms, observation takes place with all senses:

The student must touch, manipulate, must *observe* in order to learn. When I go to paint this, I first have to touch, see, and that’s the only time I need to do so. When I have engraved it in my mind, then I can paint it. I do not need to go back again and again, because I have already done that and now I have it in my mind. The mind begins to record (engrave) and then I can recall the image. (Pedro Rafael Gonzalez Chavajay, 2003, VT # 22, p. 19)

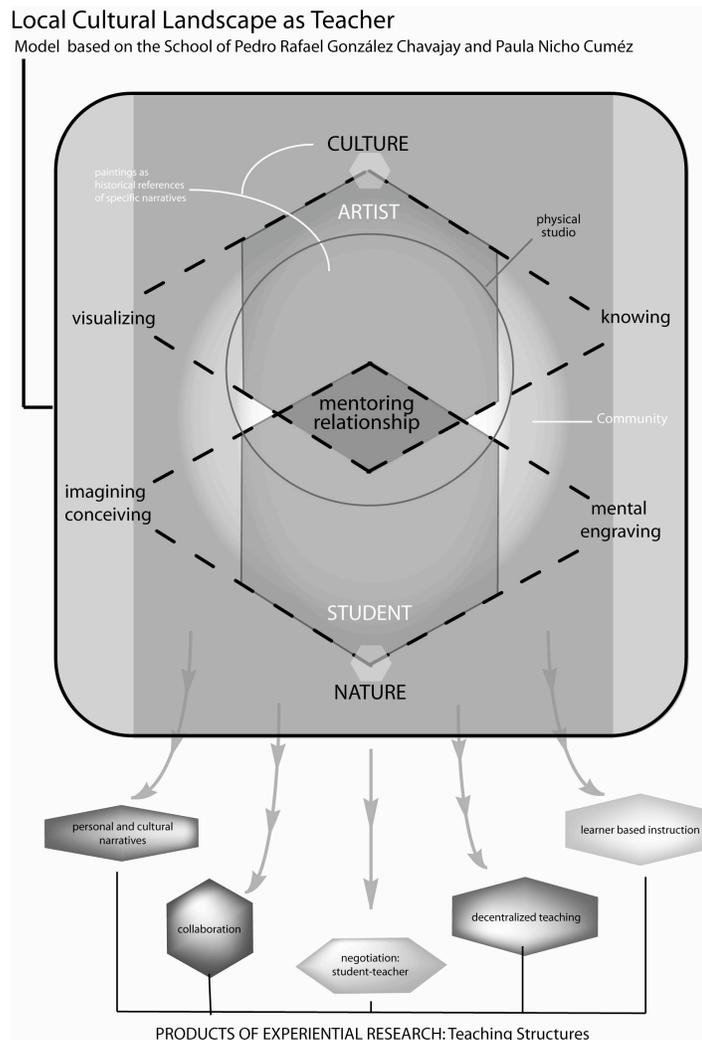
Mayan painters do not consider rendering from nature as a part of the art making process. A study such as this reinforces the importance of a variety of options for the initial stages of creation so that students do not feel estranged from curricula. Mayan perspectives enrich and expand the teaching terrain for they present another picture for gaining expertise without relying on rendering from observation.

Reconceptualizing Terms: Pedagogy and Curriculum

Pio (1997), Ecker (1998), and Mundine (1997) discuss the characteristics of indigenous philosophies as being holistic in nature, which in turn, give rise to artistic traditions that do not attempt to compartmentalize areas of art making, learning or the construction of knowledge. Because Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel teaching processes take place in art studios, what emerges is a holistic pedagogical philosophy. Educators teaching from western perspectives are accustomed to separating content (curriculum) from form (pedagogy), but in the Mayan cultures where I studied, such distinctions are non-existent, and as such, the *shape* of the teaching model is distinct. It cannot be visualized as a grid or a table, within which each compartment houses a separate component of teaching practice. Rather, Mayan studio and teaching practices might be visualized as circular. Terms such as form, content, curriculum, pedagogy - which by their nature compartmentalize the making of art and the teaching of art making - are no longer useful to describe Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel teaching practices. In other words, what you paint, how you paint, what you teach, how you teach, and where you teach are unbounded domains that converge and become inseparable in the lives of artists, teachers, and students.

The characteristics that *form* the teaching processes in Mayan art studios are considered below in [Figure 3](#). This diagram visually exemplifies the connections among culture, nature, artistic processes, the mentoring relationship, artworks as teachers that are produced as products of mentoring, and artists' studios as sites for learning. Culture and nature may be conceived of as starting points out of which the relationships between artist/culture and artist/nature give rise to artistic processes. Artistic processes may be

viewed as intersections fueled and inspired by culture as lived experience. Art making in its conception stages is not confined to a physical space such as a studio. In the figure below, artistic processes are presented as a “place” outside of the studio, where knowing as seeing and the mind as visual keeper funnel into the practice of painting. *Knowing, imagining, conceiving* are processes that exist in direct relationship to local community and nature. *Visualizing* is the bridge that connects lived experiences to art objects. Visualizations become spaces that hold lived experiences in visual forms that are then fused to the canvas to create paintings.



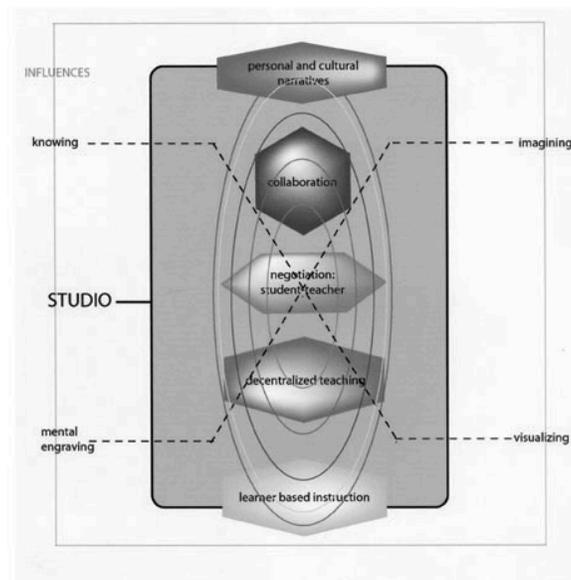
Artistic processes are the results of artists' relationships to nature and culture. They enter into the teaching process through the formation of the mentor-student relationship. In [Figure 3](#), this relationship is depicted as a common space uniting mentor/artist's practice with student/artist's practice. The mentoring relationship transcends fixed boundaries as it extends to the local community, nature, and culture. The majority of teaching takes place in the situated context that is the artist's studio; however, the physical studio is a space that expands out to the surrounding community.

The *shared space* for artistic processes and their teaching takes place within the mentoring relationship. This is the vehicle that transmits knowledge and this conduit for transmission is connected by shared personal and cultural experiences. The strategies and dialogues that result may be considered teaching structures or products of experiential learning that take the form of distinct yet interrelated shapes. These are the branches of Mayan epistemology as they inform the teaching of painting; they are pictured at the base of [Figure 3](#). Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel teaching practices embody some of the following dialogical and artistic structures: decentralized teaching, negotiations between teacher and student, collaboration, personal and cultural narrative as inspiration, learner based instruction, and trust/relationship between mentor/novice/students as catalysts for educational experiences.

Conclusion

The processes and structures depicted that constitute Tzutuhil and Kaqchikel teaching practices can be called moving entities in that each is part of the other and can be found in the other to a greater or lesser extent (see [Figure 4](#), below). When concepts such as these are applied to art studios in higher education, they also form interrelated

wholes. In other words, areas such as *personal and cultural narrative* inform choices for content of painting and teaching. They also contribute to the shared *relationships between students and teacher*, as well as becoming parts of a *negotiated curriculum* for teaching. Or *negotiations among teachers and students* fold over into *collaboration in artworks* as well as the eliciting of *personal and cultural narratives* as inspiration for artworks and dialogues. Therefore, teaching structures are malleable as they bend to accommodate teacher and student needs that arise. Decentralized teaching can occur as novices are given more responsibility, becoming experts as they teach peers in cohorts.



Studio as Teacher

Experiential teaching structures are presented as central components of a learning process that takes place in the art studio in formal school settings. Artistic processes that come out of Mayan conceptual frameworks such as *imagining* and *mental engraving* are considered influences as they inform teaching practices. They are “brought with” students and come from the students’ relationships with community, nature, culture, as well as their inner worlds; they are comprised of students’ visual culture, family culture, and lived experiences. Therefore, these processes exist outside of and within the studio space. Artistic processes, the artist studio, students’ lived experiences coupled with their cultural knowing and the relationship between student and teacher form teaching structures that become vehicles for transmission and construction of knowledge. For this reason, these are included as key ingredients in learning and pedagogical practice.

Attention to the student as the source of learner-based instruction, negotiations between teacher and student, as well as emphasis on lived realities of students (giving their personal and cultural narratives room to breathe in the teaching process) are ways in which meaningful relationships can be established between teachers and students. When teachers and students hold dialogues emerging from lived experiences and cultural practices, relational bridges are formed that foster mutual understandings, which in turn, inform teaching processes.

A holistic indigenous model for teaching such as this can help to reshape lesson plans. Lessons might be transformed to include collaboration, personal narratives, or negotiated curricula as partial constituents of their totalities. In discussing transformative curricula, it has been said that the adding on of women and minority perspectives is not enough, rather they must become forces that actually transform the teaching and learning

processes in their entirety (American Council of Education, 1989). An indigenous holistic teaching model can serve as the foundation upon which a semester curriculum is designed. Lessons can be based on a decentralized teaching paradigm in which students develop novice systems in cohorts for the teaching of painting or arts methods courses for pre-service art educators. Skills can be integrated as mini-lessons based on learner needs the way that they were in two Mayan situated learning contexts. Mayan perspectives, shaped by culture and nature, give birth to artistic processes such as *knowing as seeing* (Sullivan, 2004, p. 809), or *mind as visual keeper*. Such processes naturally foster the importance of individual meaning making and its role in art making as well as teaching. The *Studio as Teacher* as a model helps to shape what Knefelkamp (2002) calls “democratic pedagogy” in that the student experiences “the curriculum as a conversation that allows one to cross cultures, centuries, perspectives and meanings” (p. 16). The concept of life as text that surrounds the teacher and student contributes to the current discussion on the importance of visual culture as inspiration for teaching art.

Outcomes

The objectives of this study - to find and bring back new ways of teaching art based on conceptual frameworks diverging from the Euro-American - were actualized. After participating in two mentorship dyads with Mayan painters, I found that the teaching of painting was based on teachers’ and students’ lived experiences. Artistic processes originating in painters’ studios informed the teaching process. It was not my aim to imply that all art educational experiences in the studios of higher education in the United States do not consider such variables as personal/cultural narrative or artistic

process as it informs the teaching of painting. But my art education was missing pieces that I found through the apprenticeship experiences that are described in this study.

An argument was made for the adaptation of teaching structures that derive from indigenous artistic living traditions as a means of engaging in more holistic learning processes. Indigenous teaching methods that include mentorship with a learning dynamic involving the expertise of the teacher, on the one hand, and the abilities and determination of the learner on the other can be applied in modified forms to art studios in higher education as well as to methods courses for pre-service art educators. Such processes would incorporate personal and cultural narrative, collaboration, negotiated curriculum, narrative dictation based on personal and cultural mythologies, the mental cataloguing of stored visual information, and modified mentor-novice teaching systems that decentralize the teaching-learning experiences for students.

The discipline of art education is involved with teaching art and visual culture to children and adults who come from a variety of backgrounds. This study with two Mayan indigenous painters/teachers reflects my desire to bring alternate types of pedagogy into the field of art education. Its need is clear when seen in light of the diversity movement that has taken hold on North American college campuses. Many university students come from cultures that possess their own traditional art systems that are still very much alive, but are excluded from art education curricula in the schools. Immigrants, as well as ethnic and Native groups, are expected to study the Western art system and the ideology that goes along with it. Art pedagogy, outside of the European traditions for teaching art, has been relatively neglected in the past and is a necessity for a multicultural democratic society.

It has been documented that crossing cultures is critical for art educators. I am convinced that investigation into Mayan epistemology as it informs painting and pedagogical practices will serve to broaden Euro-American pedagogical methods as they influence the teaching of studio art and art education in higher education. Furthermore, teaching pre-service teachers with new inclusive strategies will enable teachers of K-12 art education to serve their students in a more multidimensional manner.

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Figure 3. : *Local Cultural Landscape as Teacher* (diagram) Design: Hugo Ortega Lopez

Figure 4. : *Studio as Teacher* (diagram) Design: Hugo Ortega Lopez