Salazar is drawing from observational research and survey data in order to propose her Five Pedagogical Ideals. David Pariser is writing on similar topics in his Studies article, “Coping With Flying Sandwiches: Where’s the Educational Theory?” As he states: “The problem, in a nutshell, is that educational theories are often couched in terms so vague and abstract that their operational implications are not obvious” (p. 303). Instead of avoiding the thorniness of language, Pariser suggests that art educators attempt to determine the theory that exists within practice, much in the way that Salazar analyzes the foundations-level art studio practices. Salazar suggests that potent theories might be extracted from current practices, informing theories that are yet-to-be.

This is a sample of the messages that flooded my inbox in the days following a research presentation I gave at the 2013 conference of Foundations of Art, Theory, and Education (FATE). On that warm spring day, professors from all over the US gathered, standing room only, to listen to my report on teaching and learning in college studio art. The responses to that presentation suggest that today’s college studio art instructors, teaching in a wide variety of higher education contexts, are hungry for accessible and relevant information on the theory and practice of art education. Their interest could be indicative of a shift in postsecondary faculty culture—from one in which faculty discuss only their art practice (Singerman, 1999) to one in which pedagogy is also a topic of mutual interest and discussion. Such a shift could be due to a number of relatively recent academic pressures: institutional and pedagogical accountability, increasingly diverse undergraduates, debate about educational values inherited from Bauhaus and Academy traditions, and the influence of digital culture and the contemporary art world on college curriculum and pedagogy (Salazar, 2013b).
Theory and Practice in College Studio Art Education

Whatever the causes may be, the conference attendees’ e-mail requests for my theory summary suggest that many professors are unaware of, or outside of, the conversation that exists among K-12 art educators regarding the theory and practice of art education. In fact, over my years in higher education I have encountered very few college studio professors who read (or even know of) *Studies in Art Education* and *Art Education*, despite the fact that these journals have, in recent years, published substantive reports on higher art educational practice.

Similarly, few studio professors of my acquaintance know of the recent College Board publication on child development and arts education (2012), which included developmental theory relevant to the first 2 years of college. In fact, in my 2 decades as a studio art instructor—in a community college, a large public university, a private liberal arts college, and an elite art school—if my colleagues sometimes expressed a desire to know the theory and practice of art education, they found few resources. Since postsecondary studio art education remains under-researched and under-theorized (Salazar, 2013a, 2013b), there are no readily accessible and relevant resources that might both inspire the accomplished artists-who-teach to reflect on aspects of their teaching practice and invite them into the conversation about art educational theory.

What might a “readily accessible and relevant resource” for college studio art educators look like?

This essay is my attempt to initiate that resource. This essay is, in a sense, a reimagining of the presentation I gave to the art professors at the FATE conference. Therefore, most citations are located at the conclusion of each section in order to maintain a conversational flow similar to that of the presentation. The citations I have chosen to include are readily accessible for any who choose to investigate further.

TWO LISTS: Teaching and Learning

I begin with two lists that represent my synthesis of the educational research and theory relevant to college studio art. Each list is prefaced with an introduction to provide context. The content of the two lists is drawn from research on adult and adolescent learners, creative individuals, college students, teaching in nonstudio art college classrooms, and studio art teaching and learning in both secondary and postsecondary settings. Then I describe, in richer detail, five pedagogical ideals identified by first-year art college students (McKenna, 2011). The two lists in combination with the five ideals provide college studio professors a (beginning) framework through which to reflect on teaching practice and further explore theories and practices in studio art education.

**Teaching**

In contrast to the traditional structure of college courses in which a professor lectures to an entire class, an atelier, apprentice-style, one-on-one model of instruction is the typical structure of studio art classes. In an atelier model, the professor’s personality, values, own formative studio instruction, and personal aesthetic choices have a substantial influence on how and what students learn. Given such influence, it is important for studio art instructors to teach thoughtfully and well. To do so, the literature suggests that an effective studio art instructor:

- maintains a deep, evolving knowledge of their field of expertise
- understands their particular college and community
- facilitates substantive relationships with students
- facilitates meaning making by connecting works and ideas with the world beyond the classroom
- teaches skills in making, in harnessing imagination, and in careful observation

Images from traditional studio art education settings act as visual metaphors for the key ideas embedded in the text, while also referencing the atelier model of traditional postsecondary studio art and design education.
• prompts reflection on the varied contexts in which art is made and why it is made
• involves students deeply in the studio domain over a significant period of time
• gives students ample opportunity and cause to reflect on emerging understandings
• encourages regular interaction with individuals who are somewhat more sophisticated
• provides opportunities to engage students in issues of space and place
• creates opportunities for students to learn-by-doing
• addresses content in artwork
• makes theory relevant
• teaches expectations for critiques
• orchestrates the physical space
• structures the creative process
• implements liberating constraints
• initiates dialogue with students
• models what it is to be an artist and adult in the world
• regularly reflects on and revises curriculum and pedagogy


Learning
As adults, whether young or old, we learn if and when we encounter experiences that do not fit with our way of being in or understanding the world (Kroger, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Such encounters create a crisis. Multiple crises are typical among college students, prompted by situations in both academic and social contexts (Skipper, 2005). During these times of crisis, students need safe spaces to imagine and explore options before choosing and proceeding; negotiating these crises leads to reframed, new, or "transformed" ways of being in the world (Kroger, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Creative individuals, in particular, describe college as the time during which they found their voice, discovered they had something of value to offer their culture, and first encountered cohorts and teachers who were capable of appreciating their uniqueness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). If college is a time of transformation for creative young people, students completing undergraduate studio art programs may:
• be better able to think about their own thinking
• entertain different possibilities on an idea, problem, or experience
• be able to make ideas flow
• be more likely to keep an open independent mind
• understand multiple points of view
• value the process of making
• work for hours without outside reward
• be more comfortable with uncertainty
• appreciate different kinds of art
• have a greater sensitivity to aesthetics
• value feelings and observations more than realism
• be able to articulate their thoughts about art
• value art as a primary mode for communicating what is most important to them

(Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Burton, 2000, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1990; Gruber & Wallace, 1989; Gude, 2004, 2010; Hetland et al., 2007; James, 1996, 1997, 2004; McKenna,
Five Pedagogical Ideals

Some 21st-century, first-year art students have contributed to our knowledge of teaching and learning in college studio art. Ninety students, half from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and half from the School of Visual Arts (SVA), volunteered to participate in a survey I created. Survey topics included: experiences in foundation studio courses, how studio teachers used class time, descriptions of what was learned, descriptions of quality teaching, and advice to next year’s freshman class. The questionnaire, comprised of mostly open-ended questions, prompted many students to write in a (sometimes passionate) narrative style. To express emotional emphasis, students often employed profanity, or ALL CAPS or underlined multiple times. Many survey participants wrote at length, scrawling over all available margins and on the blank reverse sides of the paper survey. Not surprisingly then, many students took an hour, sometimes two, to complete the survey.

Since students filled out the survey in my presence, I could make a number of general observations about the respondents: my impression was that most were Caucasian, the majority female, and nearly all appeared to be of “traditional” college age—that is, having recently graduated from secondary school. The SVA student participants seemed to be slightly more diverse than the MICA group—based only on appearance, there seemed to be more students of African and Asian descent among SVA respondents. In addition, student grammar and spelling suggested that there were more students for whom English was a second language among the SVA participants than there were in the MICA pool. None of these factors were included in the survey participant selection process; any student near the finish of the first year could volunteer to take the survey. In addition, while some of the survey respondents may have had one or more faculty members in common as their teachers, if such overlaps occurred, it was inconsistent and by chance. It was made clear to students (by me, in person, and on the survey instructions) that the survey was not an assessment of particular professors, but instead was a reflective assessment of the students’ own first-year experience.

Patterns of responses in the survey data suggested five “pedagogical ideals.” Pedagogical, because these patterns refer to how students are taught rather than what. Ideals, because these were qualities students considered particularly valuable to their foundation studio experience. Below I describe each pedagogical ideal by summarizing my findings from the surveys, highlighting student responses, and contextualizing these within the literature.

1. Know Us

Art students want their teachers to get to know them—to take a personal interest in their individual artistic inclinations and abilities, their lives, and their futures. First-year art school students praised their best teachers for frequently chatting with them individually before class; for sending personal e-mails recommending a book, an exhibition, or an artist; for asking them about their weekends; and for attending off-campus events of importance to students. The best professors were those who treated them as “fellow artists” and “equals,” with the professors, as one student said, “just happening to know more.” The majority of student respondents made it clear that they valued the highly individualized personal interaction that characterizes the atelier studio model.

However, to get to know their students, professors need not rely solely on individual interpersonal interaction. There is recent research that may assist professors in understanding the developmental challenges their students may encounter. For example: female students tend to thrive when they feel a sense of connection and belonging, whereas male students seem to prefer a more competitive atmosphere. Minority students tend
to experience identity development in relation to their cultures of origin. Current college students, as members of the Millennial generation, tend to be more compliant and conservative than students in prior decades and therefore may need to be taught to be active, not passive; to question authority; and to think critically (Bain, 2004; Belenky, Clichy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Burton & Hafeli, 2012; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kroger, 2004; Salazar, 2013b; Skipper, 2005; The College Board, 2012).

2. Help Us Make Personally Meaningful Artwork

Students praised their best professors for teaching them how to come up with their own ideas. Students learned to tell their “own stories” and that “art should come out of life.” Across K–12 art education, postsecondary studio art, and higher education in general, the literature advises teachers to help students connect their lives with their art and to make learning real by connecting the subject with the world beyond the classroom. Consensus in the field of art education suggests that an effective way to stimulate meaningful student learning is through an inquiry approach that includes strategies of exploration and play or existential questioning. In so doing, the teacher structures dialogue or activities that unlock the door to reflective critical thinking and imagining, so that student understandings of self and world emerge in and through the process of artmaking (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Bain, 2004; Burton, 2000, 2005; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Carroll, 2007; Castro, 2007; Gude, 2004, 2010; James, 1997, 2004; Schön, 1990; Walker, 2001, 2003).

3. Teach Us Skills (but not for their own sake)

While students wanted to make meaningful work, they also appreciated knowing skills—that is, how to do things. Students praised their best foundation instructors for teaching them these skills while being “honest” and “encouraging,” and wrote that their best studio professors helped them develop skills as a way to help them find their “own voice,” “gain confidence,” or “feel empowered.” Conversely, students said that those professors who failed to make connections between technical skills and bigger ideas were, overall, poor instructors. Research across higher education and art education suggests that learning technical skills is, in fact, empowering for students, but that refining processes and techniques for their own sake, rather than for the purposes of making meaning, is ultimately unsatisfying for students. In educating artists, therefore, we must bear in mind that studio art education is neither teaching skills nor transmitting knowledge, but rather creating a space for our students to pursue inquiry, make meaning, and generate knowledge (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Bain, 2004; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Carroll, 2007; Castro, 2007; Gude, 2004, 2010; James, 1997, 2004; McKenna, 2006; Schön, 1990; Tavin, Kushins, & Elniski, 2007; Walker, 2001, 2003).

4. Create a Safe Community for Us

Students praised their best professors for creating a positive classroom environment by telling stories, facilitating interaction among peers in the classroom, and engaging students in meaningful dialogue. Students said these studio professors created an atmosphere that made it easy to “try new things,” to feel “encouraged,” to “help everyone connect,” to make “class fun,” to make “you want to be there.” Said one student, “I [was] always sad when class was over,” and said another.
“I always looked forward to see what would happen [the] next week!” These student comments echo findings in the emerging field of brain-based education that suggest deep learning is stimulated by three qualities of the learning environment: variety (daily class structure varied or contained unexpected events), narrative (much teacher–student communication took the form of sharing stories), and safety (students felt integrated into the class community and were better able to take creative risks). Similarly, consensus in the fields of art education and higher education suggests that variety, safety, and narrative are important to learning (Bain, 2004; Burton & Hafeli, 2012; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Carroll, 2007; Gude, 2004, 2010; Hetland et al., 2007; James, 1996, 1997, 2004; McKenna, 2006, 2011; Salazar, 2013a; Shulman, 2004b; Walker, 2001).

5. Teach Us How to Live Creative Lives

Only 6 of the 90 students identified a skill or art concept as “the most important thing” learned during the foundation year. Instead, most students said they learned to “think and create from the heart,” “balance life and art,” “be a better person,” and “live a creative life.” One student wrote, in so many words, “I learned how to live a creative life.” A few students said, “I learned to be creative.” Most students told stories or wrote comments that revealed three traits: risk taking, confidence, and perseverance—qualities that appear in the literature as important, even essential, to creativity (Burton, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gruber & Wallace, 1989; Gude, 2010; James, 1997, 2004; Zimmerman, 2009).

Risk taking. The vast majority of freshmen said “risk taking” was the most important thing learned during their first year of art school, saying they learned to “break rules,” “not fear failure,” “just do it,” “experiment,” “seize the day,” “not be afraid to change,” “be fearless,” and “just f*cking go for it!” Students said that if they could do freshman year over again, they would be “more daring” and “less precious.”
Perseverance. Students said the most important thing learned was “to be determined and patient,” “you have to practice in order to grow,” “don’t procrastinate!” “scrap it, then do it again,” and “hard work pays off!” Some respondents admitted if they had the year to do over, they would have “worked harder” and not have “procrastinated so much.” Perhaps it is no surprise then, that by a substantial margin, “manage your time” was the advice most often offered to the next group of high school students making their way to art college.

Confidence. Students said the most important learning of freshman year was that they “gained confidence” and grew a “tough skin” as a result of their foundation studio coursework. They also found out that “a grade is only a letter,” “your learning is up to you,” and you must “trust that you can.”

In my view it is important to note here that students did not identify creativity as a thing to enact, but instead described ways-of-being (a risk taker, a hard worker, a confident person) that contribute to living a creative life. Perhaps because the foundation year of art school is a time when, for many hours each week, students are immersed in artmaking, the students learn how to live a creative life through the act of making itself.

Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted to summarize a significant amount of theory and practice so that readers, especially those who teach studio art to college students, might be better able to reflect on and articulate the value of teaching and learning in studio art. By providing citations at the conclusion of each section, I have endeavored to make sources accessible to those for whom a substantial amount of theory and practice is available. Perhaps in so doing I hope to inspire college studio art instructors about the theory and practice of art education? It seems to me that, to humbly paraphrase Dr. Gardner, new understandings of art education is destined to fail; instead new understandings must be allowed to emerge over several years of study as a result of regular, immersive interactions in artistic, physical, and social contexts (1990). I wonder if the same can be said of educating studio art instructors about the theory and practice of art education? It seems to me that, to humbly paraphrase Dr. Gardner, new understandings of higher art education must be allowed to emerge over several years of immersive interactions in theoretical, physical, and social contexts. Therefore, all of us—artists, art educators, researchers, and administrators—must together create the contexts in which those immersive interactions can occur. This is our most immediate and urgent challenge.

Stacey McKenna Salazar is Director of the Masters of Art in Art Education, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland. E-mail: ssalazar@mica.edu

AUTHOR NOTE

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REFERENCES


REFERENCES continued


ENDNOTES

1 Special thanks to the organizers of 2013 Conference of Foundations in Art, Theory & Education (FATE), and especially to my colleagues, Brett Reif of the Kansas City Art Institute and Jan Feldhausen & Jason Yi from the Minneapolis Institute of Art and Design who, with me, collaborated on the 90-minute FATE session, “What’s Happening in Art College Foundations Programs?”

2 While this publication format does not allow for as many images as were in my presentation, I chose a few images from traditional studio art education settings to accompany the text. These images act as visual metaphors for the key ideas embedded in the adjacent text, while also referencing the atelier model of traditional postsecondary studio art and design education.

3 For a full range of sources, including unpublished dissertations and conference presentations, please see the references in Salazar 2013a and 2013b.

4 The questionnaire in its entirety is available in an Appendix to my dissertation (McKenna, 2011).