“The learning students valued most was dispositional: risk taking, self-discipline, appreciating multiple points of view, being confident, and living a creative life.”

Laying a Foundation for Artmaking in the 21st Century: A Description and Some Dilemmas

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This article describes a study of teaching and learning in the first—or foundation—year of art college. As a multiple embedded case study informed by systems theory, the following cases are described: art colleges, foundation programs, professors, and students. The data were collected through surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated-recall interviews. Findings include four categories of pedagogy (structuring the creative process, initiating dialogue, orchestrating the physical space, and modeling) and three kinds of learning (skills, concepts, and dispositions). Four dilemmas that emerge from the findings are discussed: student development as a primary goal of art school, professors’ perceived conflicts between curriculum and art practice, definitions and desires for skill, and how meaning is generated. The author concludes that a culture of research and a community of pedagogical practice would benefit college art students and studio professors.

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Research Problem

When I was teaching art in high school, many of my students went off to study at elite art colleges around the country. Those students often returned—full of wonder, pain, excitement—to share tales of their first-year experiences. And throughout my many years teaching foundation drawing, painting, and design—in a community college, a private liberal arts college, a large public university, as well as in a top-rated private art college—my undergraduates confided in me as they struggled to make sense of their encounters with college level studio art instruction. Later, when I taught art education courses at an art college, students related discoveries they had made during their first year as they bridged high school and art school. And when I led Master’s of Fine Arts seminars in college studio pedagogy, the students, who were at the same time employed as graduate assistants in first-year studio art classes, reflected on their own art education and discussed their observations of teaching and learning in the first-year studio courses in which they were assisting.

This anecdotal data suggested that, while disconnects occurred at many levels of post-secondary art education, challenges to learning were most apparent in the foundation year of art college. This led me to wonder: what kinds of teaching and learning take place in the first-year studio classrooms of art schools? I, therefore, designed a study intended to illuminate the scope of art school pedagogy and the dimensions of art school learning—as understood by foundation teachers and foundation-year art students. This summary of the study includes a few highlights from the literature review, an outline of the research methodology, a description of teaching and learning, and four quandaries that emerged from the findings. To the extent that the participants in this study represent students, teachers, and content typical of today’s foundation studio classes, results from this study, while not generalizable, may indicate what one might expect to find in other post-secondary studio programs.

Literature Review

Consensus in the field has suggested that contemporary art schools are educational settings in which creative work takes place (Bass & Jacob, 2010; Becker, 1996, 2009; Buckley & Conomos, 2010; ElDahab, Vidokle, & Waldvogel, 2006; Gregg, 2003; Madoff, 2009; Miles, 2005). Though some of today’s art school students may become professional artists, the central purpose of a contemporary art school education is the development of the person as a creative, resourceful individual (Bass & Jacob, 2010; Buckley & Conomos, 2010; Enwezor, Dillemuth, & Rogoff, 2006; Matarasso, 2005). This does not appear to be a new mission for art schools; indeed, results from a 1973 study suggested that students’ primary reason for attending art college was to develop as a person (Madge & Weinberger, 1973). Since that time, there have been four scholarly studies of art school teaching and learning, each of which included aspects of the foundation year experience (Bekkala, 1999; Edström, 2008; Kushins, 2007; Tavin, Kushins, & Elniski, 2007). These reports explored student artistic development (Bekkala, 1999; Edström, 2008) or curricular restructuring (Kushins, 2007; Tavin, et al., 2007) through surveys, interviews, and observations of studio classrooms.
Findings from these studies suggested that first-year students were quick to learn that they no longer had the “art star” status that often contributed to their sense of identity in high school; in art school, there were dozens of young artists just as capable as they (Bekkala, 1999; Edström, 2008). In addition, students unable to handle the self-direction often required by art school were considered by some faculty to be unfit to become artists—so rather than work to support less successful students, they stood by as students struggled and failed (Edström, 2008). It may be that the loss of art star status and the need for substantial self-direction contributed to what students described as a competitive atmosphere that was often isolating (Bekkala, 1999). Students’ sense of loneliness was often exacerbated in studio class critiques, where many foundation professors focused on skill, material, and technique rather than the personal meaning in student artwork (Bekkala, 1999). These researchers suggested that more substantive relationships between first-year students and professors would be beneficial; instructors should act as mentors, supporting students through the first year of art college (Bekkala, 1999; Edström, 2008; Kushins, 2007). To that end, professors might address content in student artwork (Bekkala, 1999); make theory relevant to learners; balance learning-by-doing with learning-through-dialogue; and teach the expectations for critiques (Kushins, 2007). However, when these recommendations differed from a professor’s artistic practice, philosophical disposition, or even personality, pedagogical change seemed difficult (Kushins, 2007).

This limited literature on the subject of art school teaching and learning meant that my study was, in large part, one of discovery. Therefore, to better understand my findings, I conducted a survey of relevant literature beyond art education, including: college development and adult learning (Belenky, Clichy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Knfelkamp, 1999; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Mezirow, 2000; Perry, 1999; Skipper, 2005), post-secondary studio art learning in non-art school settings (James, 1996, 1997, 2004; Kent, 2001; Sevigny, 1977; Singerman, 1999), adolescent artistic development (Burton, 2004, 2005; College Board, 2012; Gardner, 1990; Kindler, 1999), best practices in K-12 studio art education (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Burton & Hafeli, 2012; Carroll, 2005, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007; Hurwitz & Day, 2007; Walker, 2001; Zimmerman, 2009), and contemporary dialogue about art school education (AICAD, 2007; Bass & Jacob, 2010; Buckley & Cominos, 2010; Lupton, 2005; Madoff, 2009).

Methodology
This study of teaching and learning fits three criteria considered important for case study research (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009): the programs I studied are much like first-year studio art programs at other colleges, I had little control over the cases I examined, and there are few studies of art schools, so a description is valuable. The limited number of studies also meant that a description of the research design itself might benefit the field (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Therefore, I explain the conceptual framework and data design, the methods of data collection and analysis used, and the methodological precedents—in creativity studies, higher education, and K-12 art education—that informed my research design.

Conceptual Framework
Since art schools are settings in which creative work takes place, the case study theory of creativity researchers Howard E. Gruber and Doris B. Wallace (1989, 1999) is critical to the conceptualization of my study. The creative person exists in a milieu consisting of interactions among unique individuals. Together, the two—person and milieu—represent a system, or case, that is unstable, nonlinear, and con-
stantly changing. As such, person and milieu are mutually embedded and evolve together, constantly influencing one another, creating and re-creating themselves.

While Gruber and Wallace examined creative work itself, the evolving system on which I focused was the teaching and learning of creative work. Teaching and learning systems, or educational milieu include: teachers, learners, contexts, and content (Eisner, 1984; Levine, 2006; Schwab, 1959). In this study, the educational milieu is made up of artists-who-teach, art students, art school contexts, and studio art content. Focusing on any one of these areas will reveal human endeavor as complex, dynamic, and ever-emergent, and will not reduce the multi-dimensionality, non-linearity, interconnectedness, or unpredictability encountered because the whole is present within the parts (Davis, 2004; Kuhn, 2008). Assuming, therefore, that the entire system of teaching and learning will become understandable through the data collected from the parts, I focused on three systems: professors, students, and art school contexts.

**Data Design and Collection**

The design of my research was inspired by two recent studies: one that focused on the college teaching of science (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004) and the other on teaching and learning in diverse K-12 art classrooms (Burton & Hafeli, 2012). Both studies used the stimulated-recall data collection process as a way to more fully understand the complex ways in which teaching and learning occur. As Kane, et al. pointed out, most studies of college teacher pedagogy rely on what professors say they do and, therefore, fail to fully reveal pedagogy and learning (2002). It is important to include observation, video recordings, and the stimulated-recall interview data collection methods in order to allow for a fuller understanding of what actually takes place in the classroom (Kane et al., 2002). In my study, observations, video-recordings of class sessions, and stimulated-recall faculty interviews provided data about teachers’ pedagogical intentions and made visible their teaching practices. Semi-structured interviews with faculty at the beginning of the research process provided insight into the instructors’ past experiences and present pedagogical intentions. And in-depth student surveys revealed students’ perceptions of teaching and learning.

Two art colleges agreed to take part: the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore, Maryland. Ninety first-year students volunteered to take the survey: forty-two from MICA, forty-eight from SVA. Since time and data constraints limited the number of studio subjects that could be included, I focused on a few of the courses typically required in foundation programs: painting, drawing, sculpture, and contemporary practices. Six full-time studio faculty members participated in the study. Three veteran professors—from painting, drawing and sculpture—that SVA administrators considered articulate and thoughtful about teaching volunteered. As I was a MICA faculty member, I knew many professors who were esteemed by colleagues and students so I invited the participants myself—one each from painting, drawing, and contemporary practices.

**Data Analysis**

As I collected data, I also analyzed. I read and re-read student surveys, categorizing the range of responses to each question. I recorded and transcribed all faculty interviews, making multiple iterations of emerging themes. I compared one unit of data with another, which led to tentative categories and subcategories (Merriam, 1998), capturing any recurring patterns within students’ and teachers’ statements. I then used the themes that had emerged in the student survey data as a framework for analyzing the faculty data. This allowed me to see a number of relationships: where students and faculty had
mentioned similar concepts; where students and faculty had mentioned seemingly opposing ideas; where students had identified a kind of learning that perhaps did not appear in the faculty transcripts; where faculty had mentioned ideas about teaching and learning that did not appear in the student data. This layered analysis made visible the dimensions of teaching and learning.

Findings

The findings comprise three broad categories: art school milieu, teachers and pedagogy, and students and learning. For art school milieu, I describe the components of this evolving system (institutions, professors, students) in order to create a holistic description of the contemporary art school. Then, I summarize the findings relating to teachers and pedagogy, followed by the results pertaining to students and learning.

Art School Milieu

Institutions. SVA and MICA are often considered to be among the elite art schools in the United States, in part because both require a portfolio review for admission and charge about $30,000 per student per year. As specialized art and design institutions granting Bachelors of Fine Arts and Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) degrees, SVA and MICA receive accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) and both are members of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD). These two schools have curricular structures typical of many AICAD schools: a foundation year requiring a specific set of studio courses; second and third year curricula featuring a mix of academic and studio coursework which marries a range of art and design disciplines; and a senior “thesis” year in which students are expected to develop a sustained body of independent work—one that is both personal in content and direction and professional in appearance and presentation. In the foundation programs at SVA and MICA, first-year students are required to take between three and five studio courses per semester for which there is normally a 1:20 teacher-to-student ratio. These classes generally meet once a week for 5 hours. Despite these similar features, the two art schools have their own particular milieu.

SVA is not located on a traditional campus; instead, its buildings punctuate the breadth of lower Manhattan from Chelsea to Gramercy Park. Known as the Cartoonists and Illustrators School when it opened in 1947, SVA began as a “GI School” with 3 faculty and 37 students; it now boasts 900 faculty and 3,400 undergraduates, just over 600 of whom are first-year students (Appel, 2009; School of Visual Arts, 2009). First-year students are scheduled in cohorts of 20 that travel together through all first-year courses. Though initially developed for scheduling purposes, the cohort structure, according to some faculty, had the added benefit of helping students create a community. SVA offers majors in advertising, animation, fine arts, graphic design, illustration, interior design, painting, photography, sculpture, and video (NASAD, 2011). The foundation year falls under the purview of the Fine Arts Department and has a media-centric curriculum comprising two semesters of painting, two of drawing, one of sculpture, and one of digital media. According to SVA administrators, professors of these media-based classes integrate contemporary art philosophies and practices into the experiences students encounter.

In the significantly smaller city of Baltimore, Maryland, two MICA buildings form a symbolic dialogue of old and new: The century-old marble façade of the regal Main Building, built in 1908, is mirrored in the gleaming surface of the Brown Center, completed in 2004, whose sharp and animated planes jot out over the street, as if gesturing toward its aged comrade. Opened in 1826 as a school of the mechanic arts, MICA is the oldest continuously running art school in the United States. MICA offers its 1,200 undergraduates...
majors in animation, art history, ceramics, digital and electronic media, drawing, environmental design, fibers, film, fine arts, graphic design, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, and video—as well as an option to “design-your-own-major” (NASAD, 2011). The foundation program, enrolling about 400 students, features courses in painting, drawing, sculpture, digital culture, and at the curricular center, Elements of Visual Thinking. The yearlong Elements course aims to provide incoming students with a contextual understanding for contemporary studio practice. The summer preceding the incoming students’ arrival on campus, MICA admissions staff works closely with Foundation faculty to assign students to particular Elements professors with whom, they hope, the students might best connect and flourish, and with peers who might, in conjunction, create dynamic, productive, and sustainable communities.

Professors. Though the six participating professors ranged in age from 40 to 70, and though each of the professors traveled a unique route into teaching at an art school, there were some commonalities. All had carried full course loads at their present institution for at least 5 years (two for well over 30), and during that time had taught upper level classes as well as foundation courses. All had earned their MFAs as young adults, viewed their graduate and undergraduate experiences in a positive light, and named past teachers who had influenced them. Three participants attended art schools as undergraduate students; the others attended universities and liberal arts colleges. Three took education courses as undergraduates in the 1970s; all three said that they do not remember, do not use, or intentionally work in opposition to the ideas they encountered in the undergraduate education curricula.

Professors’ pedagogies emerged from a number of influences, including: personal values, experiences as student artists, current and prior teaching experiences, sense of identity, studio practices, and cross-cultural engagement within and beyond academia. Three professors intentionally connected aspects of the contemporary art scene to their pedagogy; the other three consciously worked against a perceived art world ethos. While all six connected their teaching practice to aspects of their studio practice, three identified conflicts between their values as artists and the curricular values they felt compelled to teach. Four of the six professors felt it important to know each student individually. They learned about students through direct interaction with current students or by carrying forward knowledge of previous student groups. Several teachers spoke with every student one-on-one at least once during the observed class sessions. A few remarked that the studio structure seemed especially conducive to building relationships with students. Said one drawing professor:

In a class of twenty or twenty-one, since you have five hours of contact time in one day, you really do get to know [students] as individuals. And, while I haven’t taught a lit class or a history class, based on my experience as a student, you can have a conversation as a group, you can meet with a professor during office hours, you can write a paper for them, but… there is a unique kind of exchange [or] interaction that happens in the studio environment. And… we need to be careful not to lose that kind of close interaction. I think that’s why people come [to art school]. There are other reasons too, but I think that’s the big one.

Nearly all reflected aloud on the level of student engagement as they watched the video clips of their class, commenting on what went well or what they wished they had done differently to better their connection with students or increase student engagement.

Students. The surveys revealed that over half the participating students attended public high schools; 15 students came from arts-only high
schools, and 6 took courses at colleges or art centers. The majority of students surveyed said they chose art school because they wanted to “become a better artist” or “figure out who I am.” Only a third of the students said they attended art school in order to have a particular career: “a famous cartoonist,” a graphic designer, or “a well paid painter.” Half of the students from public and private schools stated that their pre-college education had not prepared them for art school, though all but one of the 15 arts-only high school students felt well prepared.

Students advised next year’s entering class to “Get to know your teachers!” Seventy-five of 90 first-year students identified faculty as the most influential factor in their first year of learning. The majority of students said that the classes in which they learned the most had been taught by teachers who interacted with them personally, particularly when that interaction was not required by the context of the course: sending personal e-mails, recommending books or artists, asking about their weekend, giving critiques outside of class time, casually chatting before class, even helping to “sell my first painting!”

**Teachers and Pedagogy**

In fact, those classes in which I happened to observe the teacher engaging students in conversation about topics beyond the art subject at hand tended to be the classes with the most visible interactions—attending, listening, smiling, questioning, and laughing—among all participants, as they made and responded to art during the ebb and flow of a 5-hour studio class. Four categories of pedagogical practice emerged during my observations: structuring the creative process, facilitating dialogue, orchestrating the physical space, and modeling. Structuring the creative process included: opportunities for learning-by-doing; assignments or experiences that nurture appreciation for process; and constructing an environment conducive to creativity. Professors facilitated dialogue with students using questioning strategies, one-on-one conversations, metaphorical anecdotes, and warm language and tone. Professors attended to aspects of the physical space in order to serve different pedagogical ends, such as arranging chairs in a close circle so that all students faced each other for extended group conversation or increasing students’ focus on their own processes by placing easels far apart. Finally, by engaging students as equals and sharing stories from their lives, teachers modeled what it meant to be practicing artists and “real” people.

**Students and Learning**

I organized the findings pertaining to studio learning into three categories: skills, concepts, and dispositions.

**Skills.** Students defined skills only as how to manipulate materials—that is, technical skills. Students praised their best studio professors for teaching them how to take risks, develop a work ethic, and generate ideas—and also for teaching them technical skills. Conversely, if students claimed any learning from their worst professors, it was only technical skills. Perhaps even an unremarkable professor can teach technical skill.

While professors in this study identified technical skills as important, they also taught critical thinking skills (how to think visually and how to talk about art) and research skills (in perceiving, exploring materials, and divergent thinking). While the professors were confident in their teaching of critical thinking and research skills, several told me how difficult it was for them to decide which technical skills to teach. A drawing professor said that it used to be necessary for students to “draw a boot to look like a boot,” but as that skill is no longer necessary in the “real” world, it is unclear whether it should be taught in drawing class. Another teacher devoted several classes to linear perspective because he wanted students to have that skill in their “tool kit” if they ever needed it—even though, he noted reflectively, most would not. And a third
professor expressed concern about whether a forthcoming plaster-mold-making assignment would be useful in students’ futures. At the same time, faculty noted that students felt empowered when they learned or refined technical skills; for these teachers, confidence was the real objective, technical skills were the means.

**Concepts.** Students learned about art and artists, and about artists as makers of meaning. On the days I happened to observe, four of the six teachers introduced ideas embedded in contemporary and past art and described various roles of artists in culture—from the traditional gallery artist to the public intellectual. Said one professor: “I’m not asking [the students] to be visual artists, I’m just asking them to consider their role in society.” However, *knowledge of* art and artists and *of artists as makers of meaning* is different from *understanding how* meaning is generated in artwork, or how do it for oneself. Faculty suggested the artistic process of creating meaning is mysterious (“the combo [of idea and skill], you never know how that works!”), while at the same time recognizing its importance:

I see kids come [to art school] with a real desire to find meaning in their lives… I think in all this desire to make the [art] school look good, and create “art stars,” that that part is kind of lost. And it’s so central to the experience of being in art school! And it even makes art education so different than anything else.

And, though professors attempted to facilitate meaningful work by providing opportunities for students to explore materials, engage in visual research, and work from themes or personal subjects, student survey responses suggested that students understood art as primarily illustrating concepts rather than generating experiences and knowledge (Bass & Jacob, 2010; Burton, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Madoff, 2009).

**Dispositions.** Whereas there were gaps between faculty and student responses regarding skills and concepts, students and faculty agreed on the kinds of dispositions taught and learned. In fact, the learning students valued most was dispositional: risk taking, self-discipline, appreciating multiple points of view, being confident, and living a creative life. Similarly, most of the participant professors said their primary goals were to help students construct a life around art, conceptualize personal definitions for happiness and success, and develop confidence. Said one faculty member, “it’s about your choice of how to live. It’s very different living as an artist than living as a Wall Street worker; hopefully it’s more meaningful.”

**Discussion**

The findings make visible the dimensions of art school pedagogy and learning at two art schools, and reveal four dilemmas that may be important when considering the future of contemporary post-secondary studio art curriculum and pedagogy: student development as a primary goal of art school; professors’ conflicts between art practice and perceived curricular values; definitions and desires for skill; and how meaning is generated in art. Below I describe the four issues, contextualizing each within the literature on post-secondary education, art education, and contemporary art practice.

**Student Development as a Primary Goal of Art School**

The surveys revealed that most students attended art school in order to develop, and that most students felt a substantive relationship with studio professors was of central importance—both of which are consistent with recent art school dialogue, the earliest study of art school students, and research in higher education (Bain, 2004; Bekkala, 1999; Enwezor et al., 2006; Madge & Weinberger, 1973; Matarasso, 2005). However, as the typical art school student body comprises 60-75% female students and research has suggested that female college students learn best when they feel personally connected to others in the learning environ-
ment (Belenky et al., 1997), it may be that the apparent preference for development and substantive teacher–student relationships is a reflection of the number of female survey respondents. That said, pedagogical practices in the art studio tend to expose student learning more than in many other undergraduate disciplines: first-year students typically develop their artwork in the presence of the professor and are assessed through critiques in the presence of fellow students. In a vulnerable learning environment such as this, substantive relationships with professors might contribute to a sense of safety and, thereby, increase opportunities for transformative learning (Bain, 2004; Bekkala, 1999; Edström, 2008; Gardner, 1990; Kroger, 2004; Mezirow, 2000; Skipper, 2005; The College Board, 2012). Transformative learning, often reflected in changes of disposition—including those thought to be conducive to creativity (Burton, 2000, 2004; The College Board, 2012; Hetland, et al., 2007; James, 1997, 2004)—might, therefore, become assessable. Post-secondary studio art would benefit from careful research of the ways in which professors develop substantive relationships with students, and the degree to which students develop dispositions thought to be conducive to artmaking and creativity.

**Professors’ Perceived Conflicts Between Curriculum and Art Practice**

Professors identified conflicts between the curricula they perceived as required by the foundation program and the practices professors engaged in to make their own work. For example, in his first years at MICA, one professor structured his curriculum around the foundation department’s “elements and principles” model, though doing so conflicted with his belief that cultural context and meaning making were central to contemporary art practice. An SVA professor continued to emphasize perceptual painting because that had been the emphasis of the foundation program for many decades—even though exploratory, materials-based approaches were primary to the professor’s own studio practice. Both of these professors noted that their students were less engaged when curricula was based on formal concepts (like elements and principles) and technical processes (like perceptual painting). Student survey responses seemed to bear that out, as the majority wrote that they preferred teachers who taught them “how to get ideas” and “how to live a creative life” to those who taught only technical knowledge. Furthermore, curricula driven by formal concepts or technical processes conflicts with the apparent purpose of an art school (to develop the whole person) and with research of adolescent and college student development (Belenky, et al, 1997; Hurwitz & Day, 2007; Perry, 1999; Skipper, 2005; The College Board, 2012).

Professors dealt with the curricular conflicts in two ways: they altered their pedagogy to more closely align with their artistic interests, or they continued to teach the curriculum while struggling with frequently disengaged students. While the professors in this study did not seem to have discussed these conflicts with colleagues, nearly all commented on the empowering effect of talking with me about their teaching. Said one:

> I have to say this [research] has been really a great experience. Because I think a lot of the times, for me, teaching is very intuitive, very unconscious, very unaware in some ways… but there’s a foundation there that I’m using, that [until now] I don’t think I ever knew really existed.

Given the positive experience the professors had as participants in this study, it seems that studio instructors who discuss curriculum and pedagogy with colleagues might become more aware of pedagogical choices, question curricular assumptions, and expand pedagogical possibilities.

**Definitions and Desires for Skill**

As noted in the findings, students and professors had different understandings of the term...
“skill.” While students valued learning to take risks, manage time, and generate ideas, they did not associate skills with those experiences; students identified only technical skills. In contrast, professors described or taught a range of skills, including: critical thinking, visual research, exploring, and divergent thinking. Given that these skills are thought to be valuable to creativity in contemporary life and art (Lehrer, 2012; Lupton, 2005; Madoff, 2009; Pink, 2006), students need to be aware of those skills. To that end, professors might open up dialogue with students about the broad range of skills taught and discuss with students the ways in which such skills might be put to use in various contexts. Of course, to do so, professors must conceptualize and articulate learning goals; many artist-professors, having never received such training (Singerman, 1999), need assistance to achieve this task.

How Meaning is Generated

There were different ways in which professors in this study facilitated student meaning-making. The professor of Elements of Visual Thinking organized his course thematically (identity, ritual), while the other faculty structured their courses according to skill (carving, mold-making) or subject matter (still life, landscape, figure). The Elements professor was also unique in that he provided class time for individual reflection on themes and prompts for student research. These factors may have contributed to the fact that through acts of making and sharing, the Elements students constructed new understandings about themselves, about their peers, and about culture.

The five professors teaching the media-based courses prompted meaning making in other ways. For observational assignments, two professors suggested students personalize the required classroom set up by placing a personal object, such as a backpack or jacket, within the composition. Another required that students use their face as the subject for a long-term homework assignment, because, he said, the students would “invest more” in self-portraiture than in other subjects. A painting instructor encouraged his students to seek a subject by walking around campus until they found a space for which the light “moved them.” And sculpture students were urged by their teacher to incorporate personal interests in order to make assignments “their own.” While each of these strategies may have elicited personal connections to the assignments, class dialogue and student work remained focused on technical and formal issues. Therefore, it was difficult to discern the ways in which students might be generating meaning the way artists do: bringing about discoveries of self, world, and art though work within particular artistic or cultural milieus (Gude, 2004, 2010; Walker, 2001).

Art education literature has suggested that adolescents want to create and discuss meaning (The College Board, 2012), as do college students (Belenky, 1997; Knefelkamp, 1999; Skipper, 2005). In fact, art educators and college professors have explored strategies for embedding technical and formal knowledge in meaningful learning experiences (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Bain, 2004; Burton, 2004, 2005; Carroll, 2005, 2007; Gude 2004, 2010; McKenna, 2006; Walker, 2001). Professors who teach media-centric courses may benefit from such sources. When the teaching and learning of studio art is understood as neither pursuit of skills nor transmission of knowledge but as a space for students to pursue inquiry, make meaning, and generate knowledge, studio art education becomes a space for radical social change (Miles, 2006).

Conclusion

If an art school education—and foundation programs as the initial experience of that education—are intended primarily to develop the person, the four dilemmas identified above suggest that careful thought must be given to crafting curricula and pedagogy relevant to citizens of the 21st
century. Certainly, both skill and meaning making will play important roles in contemporary curricula. However, well-crafted curricula will not be enough: artist-teachers must be able to integrate their studio expertise and curricular content with the creative inclinations of their students. To do so, professors must know their students.

To my knowledge, the research described here represents the first scholarly study of teaching and learning in 21st-century art colleges. In conducting this research, I have come to the conclusion that a culture of pedagogical research and a community of pedagogical practice would be beneficial to college art students and studio professors. It is my hope that this report will begin to lay a foundation for substantive dialogue about, and qualitative research on, teaching and learning in post-secondary studio art.

REFERENCES


ENDNOTES
1 For the purposes of this article, “art college” and “art school” are synonyms for post-secondary institutions in which the majority of college credits are reserved for studio based art education. I use the term “elite art school” to refer to a four-year institution that is competitive, is usually private, and always includes a portfolio review as part of the application process.
2 Elsewhere I have described contemporary issues, anecdotal reports, and scholarly research relevant to post-secondary studio art education (Salazar, in press) whereas in this report I focus on art school education. See also www.aicad.org
3 See Salazar (in press) for a detailed analysis of this literature and its relevance to teaching and learning in college studio art.
4 For the purposes of this article “professors,” “teachers,” and “instructors” are used as synonyms for artists who teach at the college level. Unlike many K-12 teachers, those who teach art at the college level typically identify themselves primarily as artists, and have not been required to take coursework in education theory and practice. And unlike expectations K-12 institutions have for their art teachers, colleges expect studio professors to demonstrate an active professional life as an artist—by exhibiting work, winning grants, or in some other way contributing to the professional culture of art.
5 For this study, the term “art school context” encompasses studio courses, foundation program structure, and the nature and climate of an art school—a place with an exceptionally large concentration of students, faculty, and staff who identify themselves as makers of art and shapers of culture.
6 A detailed discussion of issues surrounding contemporary studio art content is provided in a separate report (Salazar, in press).
7 Some of the students may have had one or more of the faculty participants as their teachers, however, if such overlaps occurred, they were inconsistent and occurred by chance. It was made clear to students (by me, in person, and on the survey instructions as well) that the survey was not an assessment of any particular professor but was a reflective assessment of the students’ total first-year experience.
8 Since students responded to the survey in my presence, I could make a number of general observations about the participants: 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, as, based only on appearance, there seemed to be more students of African and Asian descent among them. In addition, grammar and spelling in written survey responses suggested that there were more students for whom English was their second language among the SVA participants than there were in the MICA pool. None of these were factors in the survey participant selection process.
9 According to administrators, SVA first-year students in some majors have different foundation requirements, but most incoming students are part of the foundation structure described here.
10 Two SVA professors and one MICA professor incorporated “the art world”; two MICA faculty and one SVA teacher were aware that certain pedagogical values they held (and practiced) were in opposition to what they perceived “the art world” deemed important. Professors’ definitions of “the art world” varied widely.
11 To be clear, it was very rare for a professor to name a particular pedagogical practice. I created these categories of pedagogy based on my observations of, and conversations with, the six professors.
12 The term “warm language and tone” comes from What the Best College Teachers Do (2004), by Ken Bain.
13 It is important to note that one of the participant professors was unable to identify any skills taught, saying much of what he did was “difficult to put into words.” Four others, all of whom taught the media-based courses, said it was difficult to choose which technical skills to teach as it was unclear to them which drawing/painting/sculpture skills citizens of the 21st century would need to know and be able to do.