DIGITAL ARTS CURRICULUM GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Critical Media Practice

Media education within the framework of critical media practice centers learning around student-derived questions which critically engage the world around them. These critical engagements take the form of creative production — audio, video, graphic, and interactive media — which aims to critique social and historical biases, norms, and existing frameworks of knowledge. In this way, students understand making as a form of 'thinking through' and artistic production as a means to both identify and challenge issues that directly impact themselves and their community. Core to this process is the idea that making is a legitimate and powerful form of research as much as it is one of engagement, and that object-making (both in terms of physical object-making and local practices) is an important element to the development of digital literacy in that it may provide concrete frameworks for bridging the physical and digital divide.

In short, rather than learn technological processes and skills with the promise that they might one day engage with the world around them to enact or inspire change, students develop these technical skills as a product of their pre-existing capacity to ask critical questions, to identify gaps in knowledge and ways of knowing, to hold space for voices written out of history, and to recognize their agency within the world.

The CMP framework outlined above also highlights additional values in terms of an approach to technology: the development of an adaptability to and critical reflection upon the technology that students have at-hand or may be considered native to. While students will experience what may be considered more professional production technologies and processes with the aim of providing them with proficiency in professionally desirable skills, by organizing student learning around assessing the resources that they have readily available them, they may become better prepared for life-long learning and making in the emergent areas of the contemporary media landscape. Creative practices should not end when they lose access to the technological infrastructure provided by their educational institutions. To prevent this, sustainability is built into the framework through focusing on adaptability, utilizing resources at-hand, open source digital frameworks, and community-built archives.

> *A significant concern expressed in the public meetings on curriculum development has been reinforcing and refining the students' criticality towards the simplification of historical narrative spanning individual, familial, and governmental levels.[1] For the students and community of San Luis, the notion of critical media practices may be useful in that it foregrounds the need to put the means of production for self representation and digital forms of resistance in their hands. Students will be equipped to engage with present and future narratives otherwise controlled by government and private interests.*

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[1] While this has been discussed within a number of contexts, it was explicitly addressed in relation to the CDE standards for the 4th grade curriculum development. See the meeting notes for the third public meeting (06.12.2021) in RISE San Luis Newsletter #1.

A small sample of creative practices that excite us within this space include: the social & environmental justice game design of Paolo Pedercini[2], the social & environmental research and art of Carolina Caycedo[3], and the indigenous framing and discourse of artist collective Postcommodity.[4]

Aguas Para A Vida - Carolina Caycedo (2016)

Place-based Research

Place-based research focuses on using local issues, land and phenomena to connect in-school learning with students' outside-of-school lives. Local sites become environments for embodied ways of learning and contexts for student engagement across academic disciplines. Teaching and learning within this framework prioritizes forms of learning that are collaborative, communal, and democractic. Collaborative practices will take a variety of forms: from the assembly of individually produced student artwork on a local theme into an 'exquisite corpse'[5] to team-based media-making in which students can perform the roles they are passionate about (do they aspire to be image-makers, social researchers, group organizers?). A sense of communality is approached through developing research and creative practices which

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[2] Paolo Pedercini develops games under the name MolleIndustria: http://www.molleindustria.org/ (Accessed April 6, 2021)

[3] Carolina Caycedo's portfolio is available via http://carolinacaycedo.com/ (Accessed April 6, 2021)

[4] Postcommodity is an interdisciplinary arts collective composed of Cristóbal Martínez and Kade L. Twist, available via http://postcommodity.com/ (Accessed April 6, 2021)

[5] In spite of its seemingly macabre name, the 'exquisite corpse' is a remarkably surprising and playful art-game that traces its roots to the Surrealist movement and beyond. It takes many forms, but is often composed of a group of individuals agreeing to a brief set of rules or prompt (such as: "write a five-word sentence") and then performing them in secret. Once complete, all contributions will be brought together to create a single work of surprising, often absurd juxtaposition. More information is available at https://poets.org/text/play-exquisite-corpse. (Accessed July 20, 2021)

The need for this way of learning can perhaps be best described through San Luis community organizer and educator Shirley Romero Otero when speaking about the dispute over La Sierra: "If generations are removed from literally just putting their feet on the dirt, people become more complacent and more apt to be taken advantage of... [with all the changes] trying to limit access and keeping people off the land it becomes foreign to you." Sites and land in San Luis are not passive entities, but are actively understood as being deeply rooted in local history, family, and livelihood. As it is their home, students, teachers, and community members are not only ideally poised to best document the history and stories of the space, but should be the ones controlling the narrative. As key players in the longest-running civil litigation in Colorado history, this community knows well the experience of their stories being told for them and used against them.

A small sample of artists and educators that excite us within this space include: the site-specific sound art of Teri Rueb[6] which explore the shifting meaning of wilderness across cultural contexts, the community-oriented research and creative works of Cognate Collective[7] along the US/Mexico Border, and Paul Ramirez Jonas[8] whose work seeks to challenge the relationship between artist, viewer, and artwork through large-scale, community-engaged projects.

No Places with Names - Teri Rueb (2012)

Local Stories, Local Pride

Foundational to this course will be the celebration and building-upon of intergenerational relationships, the centering of local storytelling, and recognition of established notions of homeplace as a site of pride and resistance. Socially engaged art strengthens a local sense of self and uplifts voices that have been deliberately placed in the margins. This will be addressed through assignments such as interviewing elders, digitally archiving personally and culturally important objects and sites, and rooting student learning in community-facing practice such as local exhibitions.

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[6] More information on artist Teri Rueb and her locative media works are available via www.terirueb.net (Accessed April 10, 2020). Of particular note for this curriculum are *No Places With Names* (2012) and *Core Sample* (2007).
[7] Examples include their hyper-local pirate radio program at the San Ysidro Port of entry *Dialogue in Transit* (2014). More information is available at https://www.cognatecollective.com/dit-en.html (Accessed April 4, 2021)
[8] More work is available via http://www.paulramirezjonas.com/ (Accessed April 27, 2021), with special attention to the Boston-based project Public Trust

Among the issues closest to the heart of the San Luis community are the continuation of the culture and traditions of long-established land and water rights (i.e. La Sierra, La Vega and the acequia system). Meaningful experiences connecting the youth to the history of their community are crucial to the longevity of these values. As students deconstruct false narratives circulated by outsiders who have made assumptions about their community, they will also be deconstructing their own misconceptions about cultural practices they have lost access to. For example, San Luis holds a rich agricultural history that is now largely unknown to youth who have not grown up on ranches. Through research and story-sharing, students will have the opportunity to reconnect with these practices and cultivate pride in the lifestyles that were foundational to their community. As students are encouraged to follow their own curiosities as a framework for learning, the path of this course will evolve with the needs of the community.

A small sample of creative practices that excite us within this space include: Artist Theaster Gates' Rebuild Foundation initiatives to rebuild the cultural foundations of underinvested neighborhoods and incite movements of community revitalization,"[9] and the student-centered education and cultural journalism project of Foxfire Magazine[10] in Southern Appalachia.

Archive House - Theaster Gates (2009)

Responsive Classrooms & Mutual Accountability

Through non-prescriptive modeling, this curriculum has been developed with relational, site-specificity as a central pillar. It is essential to the integrity of that structure that teachers and students take ownership of the course and actively respond to the needs and values of the San Luis community as they arise.

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[9] https://rebuild-foundation.org/ (accessed March 29, 2021). Of particular note are Listening House and Archive House: a blend of social practice, institution building, and place-making which carries with it the aim to both rebuild and reinvigorate the hyper-local South Side community in Chicago and preserve black history.

[10] 'Foxfire' takes the form of classes, workshops, publications, and digital and physical media (video, radio, art, podcasts etc.). Parallels may be easily drawn to pre-existing local projects such as *Adobe Magazine*, produced by students in the Valley. More information is available via www.foxfire.org/foxfiremagazine/ (Accessed April 8, 2021)

Projects and classroom experience within this course are designed with mutual accountability in mind. On the student-student level, it will come to be understood as a practice through critique and inclusive forms of collaborative making such as: discussion groups, multi-skill project-based learning, and collective archiving. On the teacher-student level, mutual accountability takes the form of fostering student-centered questions and project models which can be integrated beyond the classroom into daily life. The curriculum aims to empower students to 'know their worth' and understand that they are not just accountable to institutions, but institutions are accountable to them.

This kind of work has a necessary 'messiness' to it as the hope of the project as a whole is to create something together — the curriculum designers, community stakeholders, faculty and students. As such, this and all documents associated with the curriculum are living ones and will change through conversation and experience. Throughout the first year of the implementation of this curriculum, the RISE Digital Arts Team will regularly check in with teachers to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the design. Our aim is to adapt the content and course structure of this curriculum over this initial period so that those wholly embedded in the community become the owners and authors of student learning outcomes. This curriculum is intended to evolve with the changing needs of the communities in which it is implemented. For this reason, it is crucial that teachers regularly take stock of these needs and adjust the assignments and course direction accordingly. The form that this outreach takes may range from in-person office hours to phone or email conversations and will likely evolve with each educator who takes on the course.

A small sample of thinkers & educators that excite us within this space include: Amy B. Demarest's research and curricular work to get K-12 students to engage in collaborative, place-based inquiry[11]; Paulo Freire on students' lived experiences in pedagogy of freedom[12], and Andratesha Fritzgerald's concepts of Honor and inclusivity in Universal Design for Learning.[13]

Agency, Action, and Play

When engaging young students in the process of critically engaging in the world around them through art, they may see this process as heavy or foreboding. While it may at times be this way when dealing with heavy personal and historical topics, this curriculum aims to prioritize notions of agency, action, and play. A playful practice (art making that is through games, interaction, creative subversion, and non-precious processes) allows for students to come to better know and understand the topics through improvised, experiential learning. Play implies agency, a student's ability to take an object, place, concept (etc.) and make it their own or make something new from it. In art, play can often be used as a means to imagine a world of difference and to take the first steps to bring that into reality.

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[11] see her section on 'doing democracy' in *Place Based Curriculum Design* (Routledge, 2014)

[12] Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Rowan & Littlefield, 1998)

[13] Fritzgerald, Andratesha. *Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning: Building Expressways to Success* (2020)

A small sample of thinkers & educators that excite us within this space include: Paolo Pedercini on the role of game-making as a context for learning and community engagement[14] and Art collective Chto Delat's "Russia, The Land of Opportunity: A Migrant Labor Board Game."[15]

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[14] https://www.molleindustria.org/blog/making-games-in-a-fucked-up-world-games-for-change-2014/
[15] information, rules, and a pdf of the game board is available here:
https://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-39/board-game-qrussia-the-land-of-opportunityq/