


Chapter Two

Spaces of Learning

In *Chapter 1: Why Now?*, we observe that all is not well in our spaces of learning. We recognize that arts education is out of sync with the realities that artists face. We begin to suggest that an education must connect life in school with life after school, to connect life as an artist with ways of being as a person in the world.

In *Chapter 2: Spaces of Learning*, we draw attention to what we call “spaces of learning” so that we can gather together more intentionally. For us, spaces of learning are both figurative and literal, referring to classrooms as well as learning groups, reading groups, collectives, and working groups (self-organized groups that have formed around a particular issue). We then describe the teaching and learning philosophies and strategies that we value.

We begin by asking, what are your motivations when you enter a particular space of learning? For us, spaces of learning are both figurative and literal, referring to classrooms as well as learning groups, reading groups, collectives, and working groups (self-organized groups that have formed around a particular issue). Perhaps you want feedback or perhaps you wish to be pushed beyond your own limits of intellectual or artistic comfort. These are spaces where you might be exposed to differences in opinion, perspective, and background and where you might then try to make sense of yourself in relation to your shifting perspective of the world around you. In such spaces, you may choose to honor someone who has inspired you or you may desire to speak honestly about what feels urgent to you in your own life.

We believe that learning together is fundamental to a meaningful life. As members of a collective, we learn, labor, and take action in continuous dialogue with one another. A collective is an example of what the social learning theorist Etienne Wenger calls a learning community, defined as a group “of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”¹ We recognize one another as learners and as teachers. We yield to one another as our individual and collective aspirations shape us daily. As the feminist scholar and literary theorist Gayatri Spivak says, “the task of a teacher is to provide a non-coercive rearrangement of desire.”²

We want to be in dialogue with familiar faces and with new ones, again and again. We are renewed each day in our collective, and each semester as teachers, when we discover who we are in relation to one another and to our studies. We get to be surprised, to try things out, to fall on our faces, to laugh together, to change our minds, to sit together in the space between not-knowing and knowing, and to grasp new concepts. When we sense new possibilities for ourselves and others, we take action in relation to these ideas. We encourage you to cherish spaces of individual and collective transformation, where people show up to grow and listen deeply enough to transform.

How do we facilitate spaces of learning and transformation?

Because we believe learning must occur in context, that it cannot be isolated from the conditions that impact the group, each person must take time to get to know the whole group, to discover how the lines of inquiry they will undertake are meaningful. The space of learning is not a journey to somewhere else. You have already arrived! *See Chapter 14: Narrate* ≡ *for more.*³ We hope that your spaces of learning are not only places to acquire the skills of research and production; they are places where you learn how to co-create knowledge, in community. You are not in a space

of learning in order to outperform your peers; you are in a space of learning to discover and share the pleasures of rigor *and* generosity. You are in a space of learning to be in proximity to the energy, gifts, and challenges of others.

Teaching and Learning Philosophies and Strategies

The teaching philosophies that we are committed to are: action-oriented, community- and place-based, socially just, critical, and student-centered. The teaching strategies that we are committed to are: contemplative, co-created, and somatic.

Philosophies

“What is urgent?”

ACTION-ORIENTED: We will ask that you connect your learning to your lived experience, creating a cycle of inquiry and action. Beginning with the urgent concerns in your life, action-oriented pedagogy enables you to bring your life and lived experience into dialogue with your learning. Reflecting on the impact of your actions will facilitate refined inquiry and further action.

“What is around us?”

COMMUNITY- AND PLACE-BASED: We believe that learning cannot be separated from the places and the people that we each learn in relationship with: your friends and family, spaces of learning, your communities and groups, the school system, and the institutions that surround you.

“Who do you think I am?”

SOCIALLY JUST: We aim to create a space that affirms the dignity of all people. We ask that you commit to educating yourself and your peers about the privileges and oppressions that people are subjected to based upon their age, class, cognitive and physical abilities, gender expression, nationality, race, religion, and sexuality, among others.³ If sexism is “a belief in the inherent superiority of one [gender expression] over all others and thereby its right to dominance,”⁴ then feminism is a belief in the equality of all gender expressions. If racism “is a belief in the inherent superiority of one race [or ethnicity] over all others and thereby its right to dominance,”⁵ then anti-racism is a belief in the equality of all people.

“Where do our beliefs come from?”

CRITICAL: We aim to understand the historical forces, root causes, and conditions that make our present moment, personal experiences, and worldview possible. We investigate our blind spots as we question dominant narratives, ways of seeing, and ways of being.

“How can this build upon what we already know?”

STUDENT-CENTERED: We see ourselves as facilitators supporting collective and self-discovery through developmentally appropriate prompts. In arts education, this is called a “student-centered” approach. As Philip Yenawine writes, “learning only occurs when learners are ready; people internalize, remember and use only what makes sense to them.”⁶

Strategies

“How can we become present?”

CONTEMPLATIVE: We believe that the ability to pay attention is essential to the work of any person. The strength of your imagination, curiosity, and capacity for prolonged thought can be cultivated with rigor. You can learn ways to bring yourself back into the present moment and become aware of what arises.

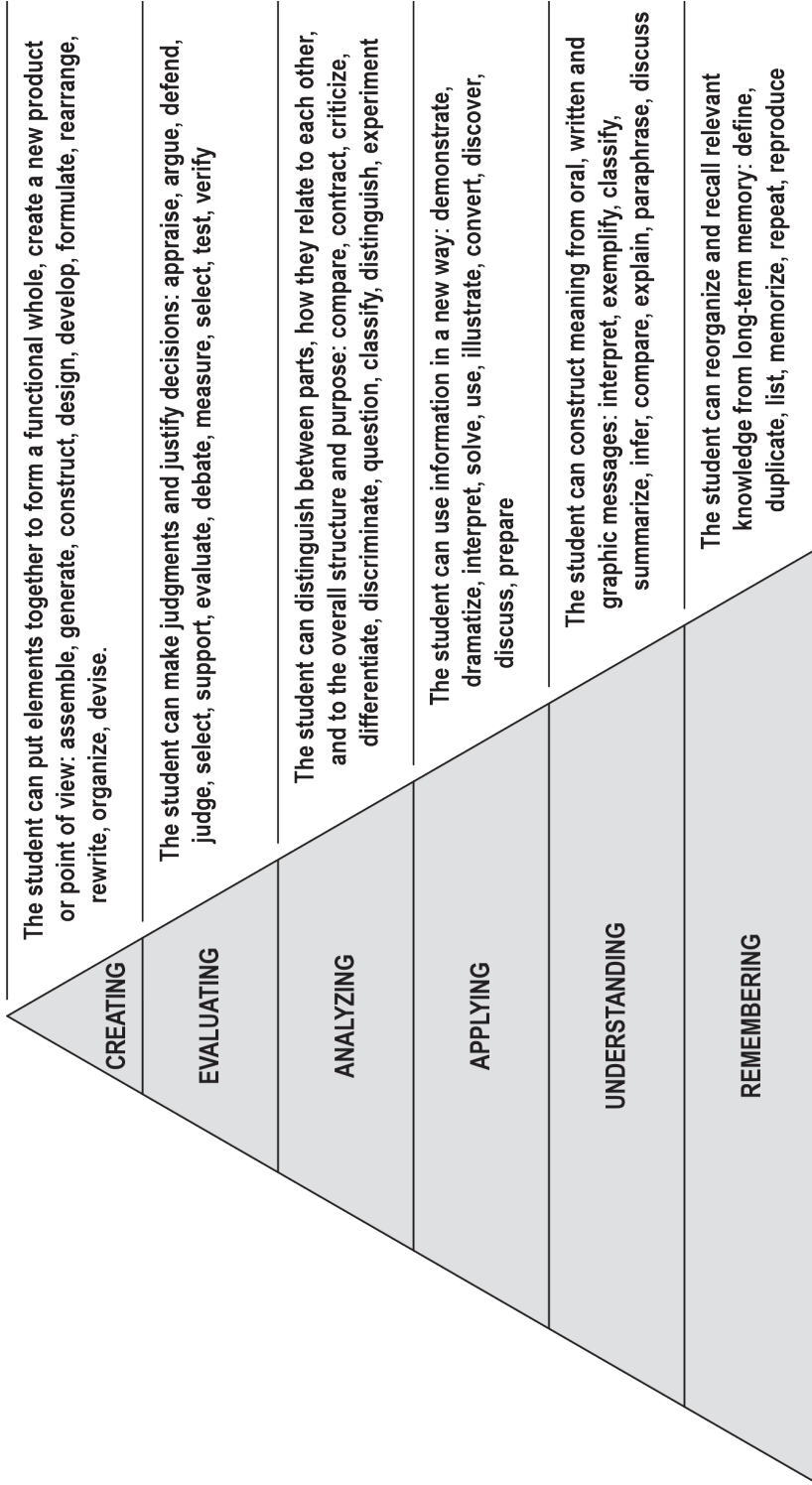
“What can we learn from each other?”

CO-CREATED: We acknowledge that everyone is capable of being a teacher and a learner. We aim to balance our authority as teachers (who have many years of experience) with our desire to create a learning space where the group actively shapes the learning environment.

“What do our bodies know?”

SOMATIC: We are committed to teaching and learning that respects the whole body, working with all states of dis/ability. We challenge a space of learning norm of sitting in silence by bringing in experiential and embodied practices that connect all aspects of our sensing, thinking, feeling, moving bodies.

NOTE: We are sharing these specific questions that guide our teaching and learning philosophies and strategies. For the past six decades, educators around the country have used a taxonomy created by Benjamin



Adaptation of Bloom's Taxonomy Revised, c.2000. Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Raths, Wittrock, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Abridged Edition, 1st Ed., ©2001. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., New York, New York.

Bloom to understand how to structure learning objectives.⁷ If you take a class on teaching and learning, it is likely that you will see a diagram of Bloom's Taxonomy. We are glad to see that the revised edition of Bloom's Taxonomy places "creating" at the top of the pyramid of higher order thinking. Creative problem-solving enables synthesis. It is where remembering, understanding, analyzing, applying, and evaluating information come together. Arts educators often champion the significance of creation in self-directed, experiential (hands-on), and project-based approaches to learning that support divergent thinking. Judit Török, the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Pratt Institute, reminds us that Bloom's Taxonomy "only looks at the cognitive domain and leaves out the emotional domain, and that learning is never hierarchical as it's represented here."⁸ With these limitations in mind, we offer this diagram to you as it is well-known outside of the field of art.

Reflection

1. Which teaching philosophies and strategies stand out to you, and why?

Teaching Philosophies

- Action-oriented:
- Community- and place-based:
- Socially just:
- Critical:
- Student-centered:

Teaching Strategies

- Contemplative:
 - Co-created:
 - Somatic:
2. * What feelings and sensations came up for you while you were reading this chapter? For example, did you feel surprise, frustration, or excitement? How did you hold these in your body? For example, did you sense these emotions in your shoulders, neck, and while reading this chapter? *See the Social-Emotional Intelligence Project Reflection activity in Chapter 4: Teacher/Facilitator Guides.*⁹

1. Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, "Introduction to Communities of Practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses," April 15, 2015, <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>.

2. Gayatri Spivak (Keynote speaker at the *Postcolonial Higher Education Conference*, Habib University, Karachi, Pakistan, October 25, 2014), quoted in Sarah Eleazar, "Teachers Must Get to Know Students and Then Learn How to Teach Them: Spivak," *The Express Tribune*, October 26, 2014, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/781113/teachers-must-get-to-know-students-and-then-learn-how-to-teach-them-spivak/>.

3. Audre Lorde, "There Is No Hierarchy of Oppressions," *Bulletin: Homophobia and Education* 14, no. 3/4 (1983): 9.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Philip Yenawine, "Theory into Practice: The Visual Thinking Strategies," presented at *Aesthetic and Art Education: a Transdisciplinary Approach Conference*, sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Service of Education, Lisbon, Portugal, September 27–29, 1999, <https://vtshome.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/9Theory-into-Practice.pdf>, 4.

7. See Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 1st Edition (London, UK: Pearson, 2000).

8. Judit Török, personal correspondence with Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard, June 2019.

