

## **Memory Progression, an Art Activity**

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### **Abstract**

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The patterns of thinking related to memory and creative process is the focus for an art activity I developed, have been observed as a longitudinal research project. The two decade study has resulted in students producing “memory paintings” and leveraged creativity for students enrolled in my painting class. I have used this activity as a first introductory painting activity. The shared memories revealed and shared has been an excellent tool for students getting to know one another and to build the confidence needed for self-expression and to build confidence. The confidence gained improves their creative flow stemming from self-awareness and reflective thinking.

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### **Memory Progression, an Art Activity**

The basic design class at William Woods University is an entry-level course that introduces art majors and non-majors to the elements and principles of design. A process I refer to as the 3Ms facilitates the basic instruction. The 3Ms is a process that begins with motivation, follows with selection of materials, and culminates with the students employing their creative method to solve a given problem.

I designed a project that encourages students to work through the 3Ms. I appreciate the fact that motivation comes to people in a variety of ways! To begin the process and respect this fact I introduce the first session.

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## **Session One**

I ask students to close their eyes and remember a time when they were so focused on something they lost track of time! As students focus on the memory of a special life experience, I ask them to select key words to describe a life experience that was captivating and made them aware that their time had disappeared. I ask them, "Can you see, smell, touch, and hear aspects of your memory of this time?"

After they have reinforced this special memory, I ask them to open their eyes and write down key words describing the memory. Next, using the multi-media board and the acrylic paint provided, they are instructed to cover the entire surface with colors that match the mood they were in at the time they remembered the life experience. I encourage students to use abstract and personal colors, along with expressive brush strokes and a large brush to communicate their mood at the time of the special experience. This concludes the first session of the 3Ms experiment.

## **Out-of-Class Assignment**

I then instruct the students to enter their key words into a Google Image search and document what they discover. I ask them how others picture their interest and to explore the aesthetic nature of others' experiences who pictured similar occurrences. I describe to them how much they can learn by recalling a shared experience with another person. Students consider the person with whom they share the experience, and regard their motivation for the shared aesthetic. In addition, I ask them the following questions: What was the context of their shared life experience? How was it similar? How was it different? They, then, record their answers to these questions in the creative process journal they keep for this class. Finally, the students print the images that best matches those of the shared life experiences and bring them to the next studio session.

## **Session Two**

Using a colored pencil to mark basic angles that correspond to the shapes observed in the students' prints, they chalk the same angles on the surface they originally painted making certain the format corresponds proportionally to the print.

During this process, they discover how they can locate the exact placement of smaller shapes within the basic shapes by dividing and subdividing shapes with marked angles (lines). They break the shapes down until they have located all shapes that comprise the imagery and begin to draw contour lines that correspond to the straight line angles. Learning to see angles is a primary skill to drawing well!

### **Instructor's Observation**

Students who suffer from drawing anxiety are amazed at the decent proportion and quality of their drawings. They also appreciate the abstract quality of the arbitrary color and the psychological influence upon their perception.

### **Session Three**

Students choose the materials used to complete this project. I show examples of past students' expressive work – painted collage, abstract, realistic, surreal and folk art, and outsider art all are examined! Students are only limited by their imaginations.

### **Out-of-Class Assignment**

Students' methods will be recorded in their creative process journals. How did all phases of motivation, material, and method contribute to the creative process? The students photograph their project for their e-portfolios and are prepared to cite specific observations in their written journal at the time of our final critique.

### **Conclusion**

This project respects the variance in individual motivation, provides structure for better drawing, and encourages personal expression. The activity stimulates different patterns of thinking and brings together required intuitive and logical thinking. My observation over a twenty-year time span of students who engaged in this creative activity suggests that two different sides of the brain control two different "modes" of thinking. It also suggests that the students preferred one mode over the other. Research also shows that the two different sides, or hemispheres, of the brain are responsible for different manners of thinking.

The memory recall was random, intuitive, and required holistic synthesizing of subjective feelings to perceive the whole picture. This was a primary force in the motivation of each student to construct a mental picture of a life experience. According to psychological studies, this process was characteristic of right brain thought processes.

The transition to art production began by comparing the mental image to images others had created. This comparison required consideration of the context of others' creative work. The selection of a best picture required a judgment. Next the sequential, logical, and rational analysis of angles and shapes enabled students to look at parts. According to psychological studies, this process was characteristic of left brain processes.

The outcomes of this study, and the real results seen by my students using the 3Ms in conjunction with this project, result in a greater level of confidence by students who have worked through the process. I believe confidence is critical in leveraging one's creativity!