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Artistic Classroom Activities: What Skills Can Students Learn?

by Skylar Davidson

Abstract

Research suggests that incorporating diverse active learning approaches, including creative and entertaining activities, into a class helps sustain students' attention and improve their ability to engage with the complex problems of the modern world. This study investigates how two different artistic classroom activities, one based in performing art and one based in visual art, compare to conventional classroom activities with the same broad educational goals. This study finds that artistic classroom activities and conventional activities generally encourage similar understanding of course content, attention, and interest in students. A performing art activity (in the form of a roleplay) encourages more improvement in communication skills than a similar conventional activity. Some students view a disconnect between learning content and learning communication skills, however, so instructors must ensure that students recognize the value of artistic teaching techniques. Suggestions for helping students adapt to new artistic activities are presented.

Artistic Classroom Activities: What Skills Can Students Learn?

Introduction

The theory that different students have different “learning styles,” in the sense that different students process information differently, has been debunked (Cuevas, 2015). However, there is evidence that creative educational content can improve student outcomes, not due to appealing to particular learning styles, but to attracting students' interest and motivation to involve themselves in course content. Many teachers believe the arts are important in education, but teachers sometimes feel intimidated about using artistic activities in spaces other than art classes, because they think they do not have sufficient information to do so effectively (Oreck, 2004).

This study contributes to knowledge on incorporating artistic activities into class sessions through evaluating how instructors can use two different types of artistic activities (one based in performing art and one based in visual art) to improve students' attention and understanding of course content. Furthermore, this study provides insight into why students may resist artistic activities and suggests ways of encouraging student buy-in.

Background

The “active learning” framework is an educational method based on increased student participation in the learning process. It is a contrast to the traditional lecture-based, memorization-based learning format, in which students passively receive and regurgitate information (Jarvin, 2015). Educators have developed a multitude of activities and discussion formats to encourage active learning, but since many students are most familiar with the lecture-based format, it has been a challenge for educators to refine active learning approaches to ensure that they are effective and appealing to students (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013).

There are different ways that have been used to incorporate active learning approaches for increasing student engagement. One is the involvement of the physical self in the classroom. A classroom in which students and the instructor have freedom of movement and try diverse learning activities improves everyone's alertness (Kelleher, 2015; Snyder & Cooper, 2015). In a more specific example, performing art in the form of roleplay increases both students' motivation to work and students' understanding of content (Carnes, 2014). Increased oral participation in class is associated with increased student motivation, potentially because it encourages students to feel as if they are learning more and causes no statistically significant changes to students' engagement in course content (Frymier & Houser, 2016).

Another way of incorporating active learning approaches involves visual formats. A study of middle schoolers suggests that visualizations improve student attention (Beeland, 2002). In this study, students rated instruction using a whiteboard as “interesting, relevant, appealing, and involving” (Beeland, 2002, p. 6). Instructors corroborated this finding, indicating that students paid more attention when they used whiteboards; in addition, whiteboards provided opportunities for hands-on activities (Beeland, 2002). Visualizations can help people of all levels, from students to instructors, to express what they think and feel (Bailey and Van Harken, 2014; McDermott, 2008). For students, visual art can allow them to express thoughts and feelings about course content that they struggle to put into words (Samuels-Peretz & Powers, 2014).

Incorporating artistic activities into classes that are not art-based is important for improving students' ability to navigate modern content delivery in and out of academic settings. The content young people encounter nowadays is frequently multimedia, incorporating multiple ways of communicating simultaneously (text, images, graphic design, etc.) (Serafini, 2011). Because of this, it is important for instructors to help students understand how to comprehend diverse communication methods (Levy & Byrd, 2011; Serafini, 2011).

Furthermore, students who are distracted in class, such as through texting or other information-processing tasks that compete in their minds with course content, experience declines in comprehension and reaction time (Wei, Wang, & Klausner, 2012). Instructors who create an entertaining and intellectually challenging classroom experience can reduce student disengagement, including off-topic technology use (Qian & Li, 2017).

Because students cannot sustain attention to a single repetitive task (such as watching a video or listening to a lecture) for an entire class period, instructors must incorporate diverse experiences into a class period to sustain students' attention (Munoz-Luna & Jurado-Navas, 2016). However, even though creative and engaging educational content and teaching techniques have been available for decades, educators are sometimes hesitant to use them, which implies that more research on how to use these techniques effectively is needed (Jarvin, 2015). Since creative expression has the capacity to help students think in new ways about the complex social and technological problems of the modern world (Jarvin, 2015), developing and refining artistic active learning activities will give educators tools to encourage students to move beyond memorization and regurgitation of facts to solve problems.

Study Objective and Hypotheses

The primary objective of this study is to compare two pairs of class activities, each pair with a common overall educational goal, but one activity within each pair heavily based in artistic expression, while the other in the pair in more conventional mode. Each of the four activities is feasible for completion within one class session. The choice to compare two pairs of small-scale activities was deliberate. A substantial amount of educational theory suggests radical changes to the educational environment, which may be impractical or difficult for many instructors to carry out (Lang, 2016). In contrast, this study evaluates four activities that can easily be carried out by any instructor. Such “small teaching” techniques as these bridge the gap between research on teaching effectiveness and instructors' actual decisions in the classroom (Lang, 2016). Further details on the two pairs follow.

The overall educational goal for the first pair of activities was to obtain general information on an issue. The conventional activity was a class discussion. The artistic activity in this set was based in visual art: a causal layered analysis in which students used drawings to help explain their arguments. (Causal layered analysis is a technique for moving beyond talking points on an issue to identifying deeper beliefs and motives; it has traditionally been conducted using creativity and metaphor [Inayatullah et al., 2016].)

The overall educational goal for the second pair of activities was to understand the diverse stakeholders involved in an issue. The conventional activity was a stakeholder analysis—a graph plotting the interest and power various stakeholders have in an issue. The artistic activity for this set of activities was based in performing art: a roleplay in which students constructed a mock news report on an issue.

This study had one hypothesis, split into four specific parts: *Compared to more conventional class activities, artistic class activities will improve students' (1) understanding of course content; (2) communication skills; (3) level of attention in class; and (4) interest in class.*

Method

The study was conducted at a large, rural, public university in the United States. Three types of data were collected for this study: self-report survey data, one survey per activity; my notes as the instructor, detailing each class session; and images of some students' work. The survey questions are shown within the tables in the appendix. Data was collected in the class “Sociology of American Culture,” which had 34 students enrolled. All students who participated in each activity were eligible to fill out that survey. Sample sizes for each survey range from 23 to 27, as a result of student absence from class on the day of the activity or nonconsent on the survey. Since this was a lower-division class, it was composed of students from diverse majors and years, though sociology majors predominated (11 people). The class met for 50 minutes per session, three days a week.

The four activities that were studied took place during four separate class sessions, which involved different course topics. All four activities involved approximately 40 minutes of student engagement. The final 10 minutes of the period was devoted to the distribution and collection of the survey. Each survey had the same format, and the surveys were anonymous. They each had two parts: The first was a series of quantitative items that related to the four sections of the hypothesis: course content, general skills, attention, and interest. Table 1 and Table 2 show the quantitative survey results for these two sets of activities, including the statistically significant differences according to two-tailed t-tests. All the quantitative items in these tables are measured on a five-point scale (0-4, with 0 reflecting more negative attitudes and 4 reflecting more positive attitudes), other than one item that is measured as a percentage.

In addition to these quantitative items, there were three open-ended questions:
What aspects of today's (activity) helped support your learning of (topic)?
What do you think could be improved about the (activity) to improve your learning of (topic)?
Is there anything else you would like to share about today's class session?

Instead of a consent form, there was a question at the end of the survey that allowed students to mark yes or no to the question of whether their anonymous responses could be used in a published paper or presentation.

Explanation of the Selected Activities

Descriptions of the four activities that were studied, as well as an explanation of precisely how each activity was conducted in this study, follow. Discussion and role play have a long history of educational use in a variety of fields (e.g., Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013; Carnes, 2014). Causal Layered Analysis and stakeholder analysis are established analytical techniques; while most common in the fields of business and foresight, they can be used in

any field (Inayatullah 2008). There is no standard, one-size-fits-all method of using any of these activities. They are suitable for different academic topics, time limits, class sizes, and other factors, so instructors can modify these activities to suit their own classes as they see fit.

In the context of the course in which data was collected for this study, students completed homework assignments pertaining to the week's topic prior to the class sessions in which these activities occurred. All these homework assignments asked open-ended questions that encouraged students to use required readings to suggest improvements to social problems or controversies. Open-ended homework assignments like these fit into the “flipped classroom” model, meaning that they get students started with general information on a topic so that students arrive to class with sufficient background knowledge to engage in complex and original thinking with the teacher's guidance. This “flipped classroom” model is in contrast to traditional lecture-based education, in which the teacher's primary role is delivery of existing knowledge.

Pair 1 Conventional Activity: Discussion

Discussion is one of the most common methods of encouraging student engagement in courses based on active learning (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). Instructors can utilize small-group or whole-class discussion. Discussions can range in length from a few minutes, within the context of a class period primarily devoted to some other task, to the foundation of an entire class. Discussion can help students feel more enthusiastic about class, acknowledge diverse viewpoints about controversial issues, and think for themselves about course content rather than absorbing information without question (Roehling et al., 2011).

In the class session used for this study, I began by informing students of the setup of the day's discussion: the students would have the beginning of the period to discuss, in groups of approximately four people, what they read and wrote about for the most recent homework assignment, which covered corporations. Following the small-group discussion, the remainder of the class period would be devoted to large-group discussion in which the smaller groups would report back to the rest of the class with their perspective on how the required readings used for the homework assignment could be used to interpret corporations.

Pair 1 Artistic Activity: Causal Layered Analysis

Causal layered analysis (CLA), invented by Sohail Inayatullah, is a technique that guides the writer through four layers of depth on a particular issue. In CLA, one analyzes from the most shallow “layer” of the issue to the deepest (Inayatullah, 2008). The layers are as follows:

- (1) Litany: simplistic talking points on an issue
- (2) Systemic Causes: a more specific overview of who and what is involved in the issue
- (3) Worldview: differing opinions on the issue
- (4) Myth and Metaphor: deep, difficult-to-see assumptions underlying different people's opinions and behaviors

Traditionally, CLA incorporates a creative or metaphorical element, as a way of expressing content that may be difficult to express in words (Inayatullah et al., 2016; Odd Studio, 2016). This creative element could take on a variety of forms, such as visual art, music, or fiction (Inayatullah 2016). For the purposes of this study, the CLA used visual art in the form of drawings as part of the analysis.

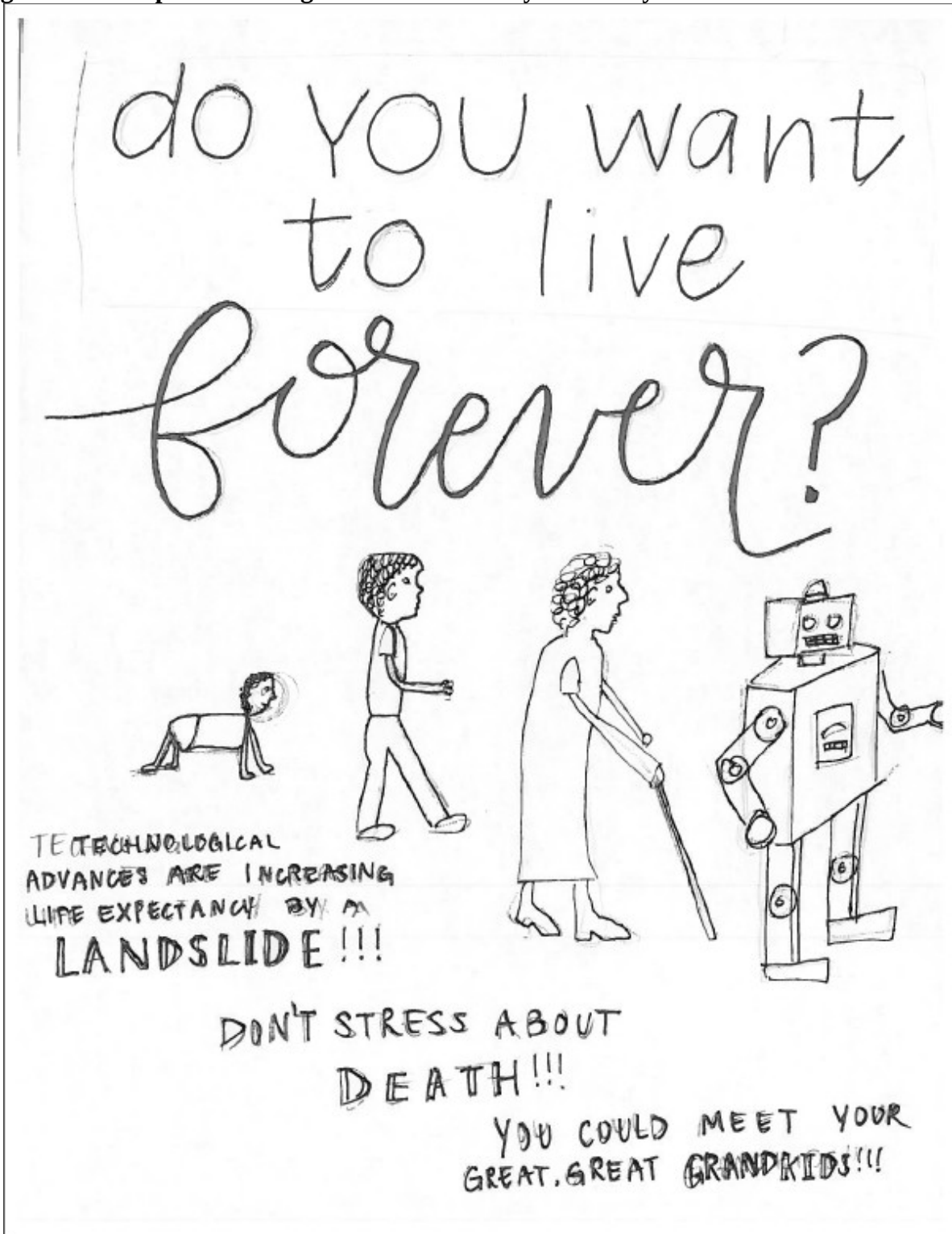
In the CLA class session used for this study, I began class by giving an overview of CLA and providing some examples. I put students in groups of approximately four people, the same group size as that for the discussion with which this activity was compared. I instructed all groups to choose a particular issue related to technology that was raised in that week's readings on the subject (e.g., its relationship to the workplace; its relationship to healthcare). Students would then progress through the four CLA levels and construct a drawing to help explain at least one of the four levels. I circulated around the room to answer questions about CLA as the students worked. At the end of the period, each group presented what they wrote and drew to the rest of the class. Figures 1 and 2 are drawings from two separate CLAs.

Figure 1: Example of an Image from a Causal Layered Analysis



This drawing belongs to the Systemic Causes level of one group's causal layered analysis. It displays a dystopian future scenario in which the Plug-n-Learn, a device that allows someone to connect their brain to a computer that inputs knowledge in an instant, has been invented. In this dystopian scenario, a rich person is shown as being able to afford to use the Plug-n-Learn, but a poor person is unable to afford education and forced to live on the street.

Figure 2: Example of an Image from a Causal Layered Analysis



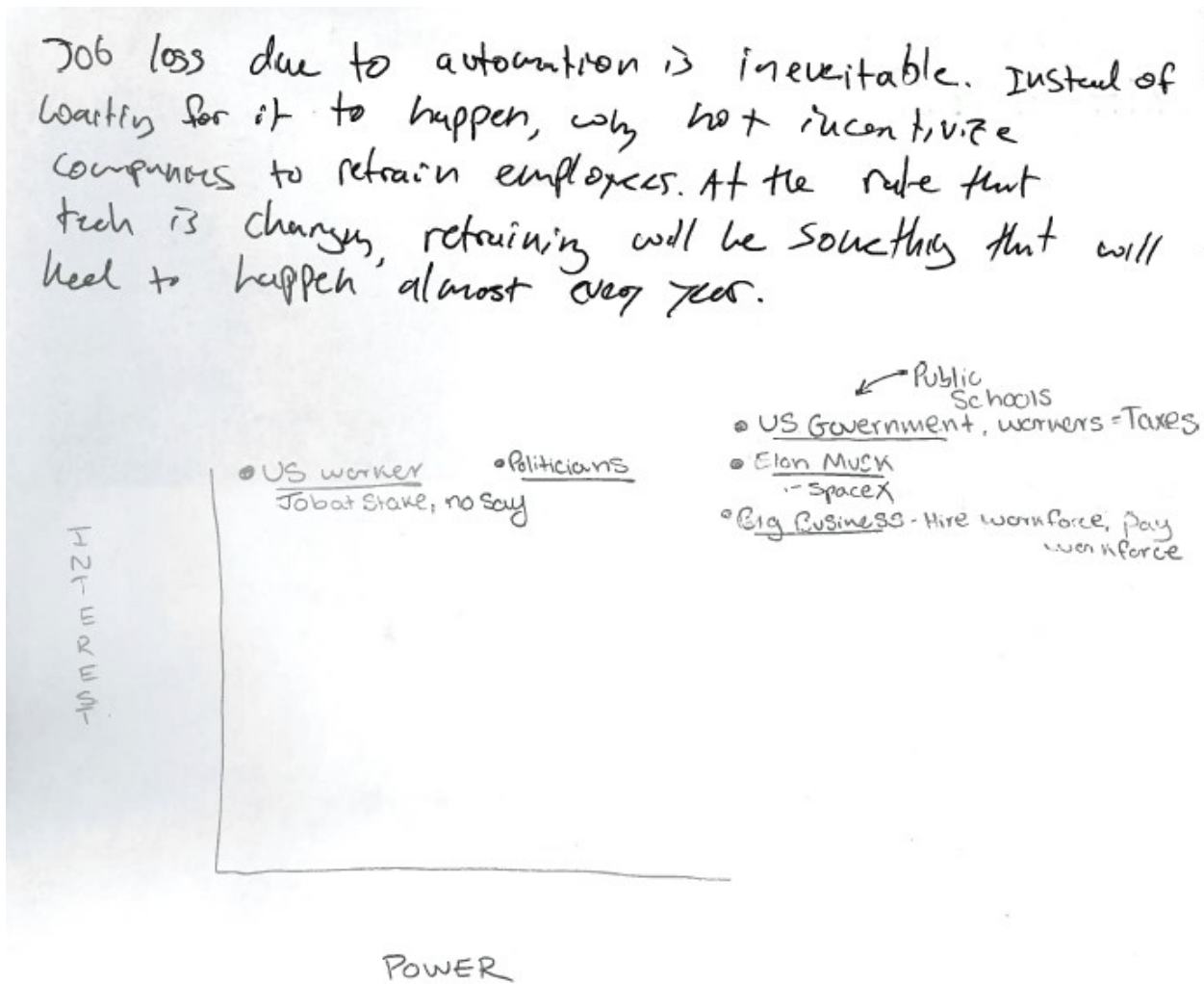
This drawing belongs to the Litany level of one group's causal layered analysis (separate from the previous example). It displays an advertisement for a potential future technology that allows a human to become a robot, who would have an indefinite lifespan.

Pair 2 Conventional Activity: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder analysis is a method of identifying and explaining how multiple relevant parties can affect, or be affected by, a particular issue (Marchais-Roubelat & Roubelat, 2016). Conventionally, stakeholder analyses interpret the power diverse parties have on an issue; stakeholder analyses may also interpret other factors, such as the relationships among stakeholders, the interest stakeholders have over the issue at hand, and changes in attitudes or behaviors over time (Marchais-Roubelat & Roubelat, 2016). Stakeholder analyses may take a visual form, such as a graph or diagram.

In the stakeholder analysis class session used for this study, I began class by explaining what stakeholder analysis is and drawing on the board a visual depiction of a stakeholder analysis: a graph with an X-axis representing the power a stakeholder has over an issue and the Y-axis representing the interest the stakeholder has in taking action on the issue. Following my explanation and example, I put students into groups of approximately eight people. (This group number is equal to that for role play, the activity being contrasted with stakeholder analysis, since this number ensures sufficient students to act out multiple, different roles in the role play.) I instructed all groups to choose a particular social problem from that week's required readings, make a list of several stakeholders in that problem, and draw a graph illustrating the power and interest those stakeholders have. I circulated around the room to answer questions as groups were working. At the end of the period, each group drew its graph on the board and explained their justification for the locations of the stakeholders. Figure 3 is an example of one group's stakeholder graph.

Figure 3: Example of a Stakeholder Analysis



Pair 2 Artistic Activity: Roleplay

Educational role play can take many forms, from very short exercises taking only minutes to semester-long or year-long intensive projects that incorporate both in-class and out-of-class work (Carnes, 2014). Regardless of their duration, however, roleplays help students both engage with course material and practice communication skills. Furthermore, roleplays tend to encourage students' emotional engagement with controversial course content (Carnes, 2014; Houle, 2006; Miller, 2014). Role play, which is based in performing art, served as the artistic activity from this pair.

In the role play class session used for this study, I began class by explaining what educational role play is and telling students that the day's role play would cover the diverse stakeholders in the issue of poverty in segregated communities, which was the topic of that week's required readings. I provided an overview of how the role play would be constructed during this class session: students would work in groups to develop a mock news report from the future regarding this topic, which would cover factors leading to either a positive outcome or a negative outcome. I put students into groups of approximately eight students each, the same size as that for the stakeholder analysis with which the role play was compared. Two groups were randomly assigned to write a plausible positive future outcome, and two were randomly assigned to write a plausible negative one. At the end of the period, each group acted out their news report.

Results

Table 1 compares, using a t-test, students' outcomes between discussion and causal layered analysis.

Table 1: Comparison Between Discussion and Causal Layered Analysis

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Causal Layered Analysis</i>
Course Content		
To what extent did today's (activity) support your learning of general information on (topic)?	2.18 (0.80)	2.17 (1.03)
To what extent did today's (activity) support your learning of who the stakeholders in (topic) are?	1.91 (0.97)	1.83 (1.07)
To what extent did today's (activity) support your learning of diverse viewpoints on (topic)?	2.23 (1.02)	2.57 (0.95)
To what extent did today's (activity) require you to use specific evidence to support an argument?	2.36 (0.95)	2.43 (0.90)
Communication Skills		
To what extent did today's (activity) help you practice speaking skills?	1.95 (1.00)	2.00 (1.20)
To what extent did today's (activity) help you practice listening skills?	2.36 (1.00)	2.17 (1.15)
To what extent did today's (activity) help you manage your emotions constructively?	1.86 (1.28)	1.65 (1.27)
Attention		
To what extent was your group's discussion specific and on topic?	2.81 (0.73)	2.73 (0.88)
Rate your level of attention in class today.	2.64 (0.73)	2.78 (0.74)
Did you use your phone or computer for non-academic purposes during this class session?	41%	41%
Interest		
Rate your level of interest in (topic) before today's class.	2.14 (1.17)	1.69 (0.76)
Rate your level of interest in (topic) after today's class.	2.68 (0.99)	2.30 (0.82)
Pre-post change in interest	0.55 (1.18)	0.61 (0.87)
How enjoyable do you consider the (activity) format in the classroom?	2.45 (0.86)	2.13 (0.87)
N	23	24

^ p<.1; * p<.05; ** p<.01

Items use a five-point scale (0-4, with 0 reflecting more negative attitudes and 4 reflecting more positive attitudes), excepting the third question under Attention, which is measured as the percentage saying "yes." Standard deviations are in parentheses. T tests were undertaken between these two activities for all items other than the first two questions under the Interest heading, those two skipped because only the pre-post change in interest is relevant.

Table 2 compares, using a t-test, students' outcomes between stakeholder analysis and roleplay. Each table displays the mean and standard deviation for each survey question.

Table 2: Comparison Between Stakeholder Analysis and Roleplay

<i>Survey Item</i>	<i>Stakeholder Analysis</i>	<i>Roleplay</i>
Course Content		
To what extent did today's (activity) support your learning of general information on (topic)?	1.88 (0.91)	1.61(1.20)
To what extent did today's (activity) support your learning of who the stakeholders in (topic) are?	2.27 (0.83)	1.84 (1.01)
To what extent did today's (activity) support your learning of diverse viewpoints on (topic)?	2.00 (0.85)	2.00 (0.94)
To what extent did today's (activity) require you to use specific evidence to support an argument?	2.27 (0.60)	2.07 (0.93)
Communication Skills		
To what extent did today's (activity) help you practice speaking skills?	1.77 (1.03)	2.27 (1.12)^
To what extent did today's (activity) help you practice listening skills?	2.31 (0.97)	2.46 (0.86)
To what extent did today's (activity) help you manage your emotions constructively?	1.44 (1.12)	1.96(1.06)^
Attention		
To what extent was your group's discussion specific and on topic?	2.76 (0.83)	2.88 (0.71)
Rate your level of attention in class today.	2.73 (0.60)	2.65 (0.85)
Did you use your phone or computer for non-academic purposes during this class session?	46%	35%
Interest		
Rate your level of interest in (topic) before today's class.	2.19 (0.85)	2.76(0.76)
Rate your level of interest in (topic) after today's class.	2.46 (0.76)	3.00 (0.69)
Pre-post change in interest	0.27 (0.53)	0.23 (0.43)
How enjoyable do you consider the (activity) format in the classroom?	2.15 (0.73)	1.46 (1.24)*
N	27	27

^ p<.1; * p<.05; ** p<.01

Items use a five-point scale (0-4, with 0 reflecting more negative attitudes and 4 reflecting more positive attitudes), excepting the third question under Attention, which is measured as the percentage saying "yes." Standard deviations are in parentheses. T tests were undertaken between these two activities for all items other than the first two questions under the Interest heading, those two skipped because only the pre-post change in interest is relevant.

The paragraphs that follow highlight key findings and themes that emerged from the surveys and provide suggestions for effective implementation of new artistic class activities.

Benefits of Artistic Activities

The results of this study provide a sharp contrast to the skepticism that is sometimes expressed for creative activities (e.g., Carnes, 2014). When looking at students' understanding of course content and attention in class, there is no statistically significant difference between artistic activities and conventional activities. In other words, artistic and conventional activities provide equally valuable opportunities for students to learn new concepts, and both types of activities keep students on topic.

In some ways, artistic activities are superior to conventional activities. When comparing the role play and stakeholder analysis, the role play was superior in helping students practice communication skills as shown by students' comments and quantitative data. Some students reported that role plays helped them build speaking skills. For example:

Public speaking is something that makes me very nervous so I was glad I got to exercise that skill!
I really had to listen and publically [sic] speak accordingly. My knowledge had to be on point.

Quantitative data showed a statistically significant difference between these two activities with regard to the degree to which students practiced speaking skills and managed their emotions constructively. When looking at speaking skills, the mean value for stakeholder analysis was 1.77, and the mean value for roleplay was 2.27. When looking at managing emotions, the mean value for stakeholder analysis was 1.44 and the mean value for roleplay was 1.96. There was no statistically significant difference between discussion and causal layered analysis in communication skills, possibly because both of those techniques required of students forms of speaking that are more familiar.

Despite these positive findings, there was a statistically significant difference between the degree to which students find role play and stakeholder analysis enjoyable. The mean value for stakeholder analysis was 2.15, and the mean value for role play was 1.46, indicating that students overall liked role play less than stakeholder analysis. Also notable was the fact that the standard deviation for the role play was larger (1.24) than that for stakeholder analysis (0.73). This difference in standard deviations indicates that there is more variability in students' enjoyment of role play than in their enjoyment of stakeholder analysis. This response can be interpreted in the context of social awkwardness in a dynamic active learning environment. Millennial students fear looking unintelligent or vulnerable in front of their classmates (Roehling et al., 2011). This can lead students to be hesitant to speak up in class (Roehling et al., 2011). Since artistic activities are new to many students, they may worry about making a mistake or about performing poorly in front of others, leading them to feel uneasy and dislike roleplay compared to an activity such as stakeholder analysis that requires more familiar forms of group discussion and presentation to the class.

Furthermore, students' thoughts and feelings about role play can vary depending on their major (Stevenson & Sander, 2002). In Stevenson and Sander's (2002) study, they compared medical students, business students, and psychology students. They found that medical students were the most skeptical of role play because they tended to distrust student-produced knowledge. Among those business and psychology students who were skeptical of role play, the most common reasons were concern for students who might feel uncomfortable, as well as concerns over inequality in participation (Stevenson and Sanders, 2002). Such empathetic concerns were displayed in the comments for the role play survey:

[Roleplay] could be nervewracking for some students.
I had an issue with Group 4, who were two [men] speaking, not letting the [women] speak. The [women] were okay with it!
Some people were very convincing in their point of view which made it easier to understand all sides of the issue. In some groups only a couple people spoke so it was hard to differentiate between viewpoints/stakeholders.

Improving Student Engagement

In order to ensure that all students understand the purpose for role plays and feel comfortable participating, instructors should attend to all these concerns, especially in a course composed of students from diverse majors.

During a role play, all students could be required to take on a speaking role, to equalize opportunity and participation (Joyner & Young, 2006). If a class relies heavily on role play, students could be required to switch roles so that they have more ability to experience different aspects of role play (Joyner & Young, 2006). In addition, the instructor may help ease students into role play through participating in writing scripts (Saeed, 2016) or even participating in the acting itself (Joyner & Young, 2006). This could ensure that speakers' roles are more equal, as well as providing a stronger instructor-based structure to encourage interest among those students who tend to distrust student-produced content.

A related topic that arose in the qualitative comments involved the extent to which students believed artistic and conventional activities help them understand course content. Some comments demonstrated that the artistic aspects of these activities were directly related to some students' positive outcomes.

In the CLA survey, some students noted how CLA helped them build their knowledge; for example:

“Making arts and crafts to support the concepts”

“The creativity and fun”

“Being able to organize my thoughts in a visual way”

For CLA, these students indicated that the visual art aspect of the activity allowed them to think more clearly about the day's topic. As Inayatullah et al. (2016) explained, people's communication methods not only describe reality but also construct reality. Assessing one's own communication methods can help people both better understand their thoughts and build more effective analyses and plans (Inayatullah et al., 2016).

For role play, these students indicated that the performing art aspect allowed them to feel, not just understand, different perspectives on controversial issues. Some representative comments are:

Communicating with others and experiencing different perspectives

Real-life scenarios of negative/positive future outcomes

[It is] interesting to think about a specific situation

It helped to empathize with different stakeholders and see different points of view.

As Carnes (2014) explained, role play can encourage people to move to higher-level thinking through providing a method of engaging intricately with events and emotions. Students' interest in the action of a role play encourages them to persist to the point that they engage with higher-order skills (Carnes, 2014).

Other student comments backed up these results; for example, a student noted on the discussion survey that they would have preferred a “*more hands on activity.*” However, some other students had different expectations for academic work. For example:

These types of activities make it difficult to focus on the question at hand. We were more worried about the drawing/presentation than the content. (from the CLA survey)

I was so focused on the news report, I didn't really get the [information on the day's topic]. (from the roleplay survey)

These comments demonstrate that some students were most focused on learning course content, as opposed to learning communication skills, even to the point of viewing a disconnect between these two goals. However, education on different types of communication media is essential nowadays, in order to help students think critically about new media and resist manipulation (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Serafini, 2011). In order to help students see the value of artistic activities, the instructor may need to address the importance of communication and media skills directly with the class (Joyner & Young, 2006).

Furthermore, instructors may need to allot additional time for innovative activities. Compared to their comments about conventional activities, more students stated that they would have liked additional time to complete their work in the artistic activities. Specifically, eight said so in the CLA and seven said so in the roleplay, compared to none in the discussion and only one in the stakeholder analysis. If instructors wish to use artistic activities in class when they have limited time, they could complete some of the preparation in advance of a class session. For example, instructors can put instructions or examples online for students to view before coming to class, and if applicable, topics and groups can be chosen in advance, either by the instructor or by students. Furthermore, when artistic activities are used in classes other than art classes, instructors can remind students that they are being assessed on the quality of their ideas rather than on their artistic skill or experience. Finally, instructors who rely heavily on one particular type of creative activity (such as roleplay or skits) may find that students acclimate to the routine over time, causing setup to be easier (Carnes, 2014; Saeed, 2016).

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that hesitancy to incorporate art into the active learning framework is unnecessary. Artistic activities are equally as useful as conventional activities and sometimes superior in their ability to improve students' communication and media skills. However, since artistic activities are new to many students, instructors must inform them of the benefits of artistic activities, as well as provide sufficient activity structure to encourage participation. Educators have numerous learning goals for their students, not only mastery of a particular subject area but also general academic and life skills. Artistic activities can be an effective supplement in classes to achieve these goals.

This study analyzed the use of these activities as low-stakes assignments in a higher education setting. Modifications to these activities would help them better fit into other settings (for example, K-12 education or high-stakes assignments). While I gave verbal instructions for these activities, instructors in other settings may benefit from written instructions, worksheets, or checklists. For example, a worksheet for a stakeholder analysis activity could have three parts: (1) a blank list at the top of the page where students are asked to fill in a specified number of stakeholders based on a lecture, reading, or piece of media from the class; (2) a blank power and interest graph where students would plot the stakeholders; and (3) blank lines at the end where the student would fill in an interpretation of the graph.

Finally, this study has determined that students may see a disconnect between learning about course content and learning communication skills. In order to encourage student buy-in when using active learning techniques that are unfamiliar, instructors can encourage transparency (Seidel & Tanner, 2013). When instructors discuss with students the reason for using specific pedagogical tools in class, students are more likely to understand what is expected of them, as well as how the tools benefit them (Seidel & Tanner, 2013). Furthermore, this transparency encourages rapport between instructor and students (Seidel & Tanner, 2013), which helps make the classroom an enriching space for students to explore both new content and new skills.

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