

Unguarded Moments: Eavesdropping, Arts-Based Practices, and Transformative Teaching Spaces

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Abstract

What have we learned from the experiences of teaching during COVID-19? Our participant-author group all introduced arts-based practices as a way of reaching students. Arts-based research (ABR) is a diverse field (Leavy, 2020), and in particular the arts can embody and integrate empathetic knowledge when it comes to the emotional aspects of learning (Chilton & Leavy, 2015). Yet, effective ABR practice relies on authentic connection not only with our students but also with each other. In formal institutional spaces, under conditions of stress and anxiety, finding moments of connection is not only challenging, but also requires careful listening as we endeavor to be fully present in these spaces. We use narratives and overheard conversations to explore how we coax our students to connect to content, to ourselves, and to each other. We notice these vulnerable spaces through seeing and listening and draw on our experiences as teachers in a Faculty of Education, a postsecondary community, to explore the themes of arts-based practices and deep listening. We show how arts-based practices require us to be present in our bodies, to look, listen, and notice. Although sometimes risky, the unpredictable aspect of arts-based practices taps into the vitality and spontaneity of human lives that students find meaningful and enjoyable. The purpose of this paper is to share our experiences and to examine exactly why these practices worked.

Keywords

deep listening; arts-based practices; transformative teaching; COVID-19; social and emotional learning; SoTL; postsecondary learning

Introduction

What have we learned from the experiences of teaching during the evolving global COVID-19 pandemic? What more can we do to transform teaching and learning? Our participant-author group all engaged in arts-based practices to reach students. Although arts-based research (ABR) is a diverse field (Leavy, 2020), the use of the arts to embody and integrate an “empathetic knowledge that is effective in communicating emotional aspects of social life” remains a core goal (Chilton & Leavy, 2015, p. 407). Yet, effective arts-based practices in education rely on authentic connections not only with our students but also with each other. In formal institutional spaces that condition us into thinking how we should behave, finding moments of connection is challenging and requires deep listening as we endeavor to be fully present in spaces that are not fully unguarded. Being guarded means that we are careful about how we present ourselves to each other and to the world as we edit our vulnerable selves out of our shared frame of reference. In this paper, we use narrative to explore unguarded moments of deep listening.

Literature Review

Improving student learning through scholarly inquiry about teaching and learning and sharing these findings within the larger community are the aims of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Within the Canadian landscape, SoTL research includes a community of practice that shares resources and research, contributes to the dissemination of scholarship about teaching and learning, and mentors and collaborates on effective approaches to building knowledge in this area (STLHE, n.d.). SoTL is commonly misunderstood and undervalued in postsecondary education institutions, but when the COVID-19 pandemic created upheaval across campuses, the importance of embracing teaching and learning roles became unmistakable. As the ground was shifting in postsecondary education, systematic studies of teaching and learning were “embraced as strategies to navigate this chaos” (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2021).

While SoTL has primarily been dominated by the various epistemologies, philosophies, and research methods employed within the social sciences, there have recently been appeals to increase arts and humanities applications (Chick, 2015; Potter & Wuetherick, 2015). This stems largely from the arts and humanities contributions in communicating “elements of the human condition and experience (such as culture, languages, values and ideas) using critical, historical, analytical, comparative, or interpretive methods—often, in the process, employing metaphor, narrative, analogy, and other linguistic and imaginative devices” (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015, p. 8). These “linguistic and imaginative devices” create moments where our vulnerable selves and those of our students are heard and interpreted in the classroom, and the outcomes serve as the reward for including arts-based applications within our pedagogies. Arts-based applications of SoTL reveal “that arts-based teaching and learning has the power to energize and promote student engagement by increasing opportunities for students to articulate their learning in many different ways” (Bellefeuille et al., 2018, p. 92).

Arts-Based Teaching and Learning Practices

The turn towards the arts in classroom practice has been fueled by the arts-based research movement. Arts-based research is a term conceived by Eisner in the early 1990s and has since developed into a major methodological genre (Barone, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2017,

2020). Epistemologically, arts-based methods are based on aesthetic knowing (Nielsen, 2004). This approach assumes that arts and artist practices can convey knowledge about the self and others (Gerber et al., 2012). Aesthetic knowing through arts-based approaches is explicitly linked to eliciting reflexivity and empathy in the participant. Aesthetics are also linked to care and compassion (McIntyre, 2004). Arts-based philosophy is also strongly influenced by philosophical understandings of “the body” and embodiment, and in this paper through embodied practice, we develop new insights and methods of communication in teaching and learning (Irwin, 2008).

Arts-based approaches assume that nonverbal ways of knowing are recognised and valued where art is used to express what words cannot (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Gerber et al., 2012). Multiple ways of knowing, such as sensory, kinesthetic, and imaginative knowing are included (Gerber et al., 2012). This makes arts-based practice more accessible, engaging, and emotion-driven than other methods, as it is imbued with the tenets of creativity and artmaking. Chilton and Leavy (2015) contend that because arts-based research is “free from academic jargon and other prohibitive barriers, the arts have the potential to reach a broad range of people and to be emotionally and/or politically evocative for diverse audiences” (2015, p. 403). The arts can, by their very nature, evoke, influence, and incite change (Leavy, 2020). Arts-based practices can also accentuate emotions, feelings, and sentiments that help us explore complex people, places, and circumstances (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Arts-based learning artistically investigates and promotes thinking, understanding, and knowledge through expression, passion, and emotion. It can “touch the souls of students” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 4).

Arts-Based Learning and SoTL

Although more limited in scope, there have been some exceptional studies using arts-based approaches documented within the SoTL literature. These arts-based applications involve constructing meaningful approaches to teaching hands-on studio-based art and design classes online during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2021). Other examples include employing self-portraits to deepen students’ creative capacities and confidence when using arts-based methods with vulnerable children and youth (Bellefeuille et al., 2018), drawing parallels between actors’ approaches to theatre performance and engagement with SoTL inquiry (Simmons & Simmons, 2021), and applying a/r/tography as a synchronous research method that enhances and deepens SoTL projects (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In the latter research study, the authors used a/r/tography, a self-study, community, and relational and ethical inquiry, as a means of investigating their own pedagogies. In this study, we examine our own teaching and learning practices that apply arts-based approaches and investigate the ways in which these methods allow us to listen more intently to our students during unguarded vulnerable moments.

Method of Inquiry

We are three professors and one doctoral candidate/student services staff member situated in a Faculty of Education in a mid-sized public university in Atlantic Canada. Our expertise encompasses postsecondary education and academic writing, as well as arts-based research, teaching, and learning. All four participant authors have experienced teaching and learning through the pandemic in different ways, and all have aligned arts-based practice for deeper learning and greater student impact. We use narratives to explore unguarded moments of deep listening through arts-based practices in teaching and learning.

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping means to secretly listen to a conversation. It comes from the idea of someone standing under the eaves of a house listening in to a private conversation. We have used the term “eavesdropping” to denote the times when we unintentionally hear what our students are really saying. These moments of discovery and clarity often invoke further deep listening. In the COVID-19 pandemic, students continue to deal with unusual levels of stress, and their lives have become more complicated on many levels. The constant crisis messages, lockdown requirements and changes, fear of illness, and so on contributed to conditions we had not experienced before. This meant we had to listen to our students beyond what they were saying on the surface of the interaction. We needed to listen deeply, sometimes discreetly, and to eavesdrop in order to hear. Deep listening is about listening beyond what people say aloud (Haskell, 2001). Communication is fraught with misperceptions and unintended consequences. Sometimes people cannot verbalize what they are feeling. In classroom situations where the instructor plays an authoritative role, especially when it comes to assessment, it may be difficult for students to communicate what they really want to tell us. Yet, if we are open to listening deeply, our unconscious may pick up on messages that our minds often miss.

Narratives

In this paper, we draw on our experiences as educators in the postsecondary community to explore themes of vulnerability, thoughtful noticing, and unguarded listening. By using a narrative approach, we assume: “Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected, organized, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). We identified “narrative” to mean a discrete unit of discourse as a response to a prompt: *Describe a moment of eavesdropping in relation to arts-based teaching and learning*. The moment of eavesdropping could be an actual conversation or a constructed reflective discussion to illustrate the conversations that may have transpired. These would not be verbatim but give an authentic glimpse into the many conversations we have had with students about teaching, learning, arts, and research. Ellis (2004) used a similar approach in her methodological novel on autoethnography, where she constructed ethnographic scenes based on events that actually happened, along with fictional scenes that could have occurred. Apart from the prompt, we placed few restrictions, other than a 500-word limit for each narrative.

With a narrative approach, we acknowledge that the sense a person makes of an experience is important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Riessman, 2008). We wrote “stories with raw and naked emotion that investigate life’s messiness, including twists of fate and chance” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 10). Risk is a welcome but unpredictable part of an arts-based practice that taps into the vitality and spontaneity of human lives, which can never be fully contained by any one institutional space. We make and interpret our narratives to reclaim ourselves in the hopes that we learn and grow in the struggle. As Wiebe and Snowber suggest (2012), “If one cannot hear the interior quakes of a life, it is very difficult to hear the quakes and questions of our students” (p. 459). Additionally, by modelling processes of personal inquiry, we encourage our students, listeners, and readers to engage in their own processes of inquiry, and thereby, to support a key building block of learning—the development and expression of their own voices. Our aim with this paper is to showcase the arts-based practices that we successfully applied in a meaningful manner

throughout our work with students. We share illustrative examples, challenges, and opportunities that have presented themselves in this collective journey.

Process of Inquiry and Analysis

Our process of inquiry involved writing individual narratives, collaborative dialogue, and analysis; like archaeologists, we rummaged beneath the written words. Narrative analysis focuses on how a story is communicated, what is chosen to be told, what language is used, and what is emphasized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We examined those choices and developed a systematic but open, non-reductive approach to analysing narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Riessman, 2008). We used Saldana and Omasata's (2018) suggestions for coding to develop themes around processes, emotions, and values as well as descriptive codes drawn from our own words. This coding process led us to develop emerging themes. In thematic analyses of narrative, although the content is the key focus, the case is kept intact. Themes are drawn from the case initially before being compared across other cases. In other words, the micro context of the case is important here. Through our thematic analysis we wanted to access meanings beyond individual storytellers and move towards broader social implications. In the sections that follow, we present our narratives and subsequently discuss the emerging themes that arose throughout the coding process.

Cecile's Narrative

"Did you read the assignment instructions," I ask a Master's student. His assignment is far from what he was required to do.

"No," he shakes his head.

I teach a face-to-face graduate course ED 6461 Graduate Research Writing. Most of the students who attend are Master's or Ph.D. students writing dissertations. I taught it for six years before the pandemic and twice during COVID-19. The first time I taught it during the pandemic we were online, and the second time we were back in the classroom, albeit with masks. The second time I really noticed a difference in students: a distinct level of distraction. I found myself repeating instructions over and over again. For example, for the first assignment, I gave them a printed handout of the instructions even though detailed notes were available online in the course shell. I also went through the entire handout in class.

My conversation was with a student who was in class when I went through the instructions. Because he was always eager, I was surprised to see his poor assignment. As he sat across from me, I noticed the slump of his shoulders and the exhaustion in his eyes. I couldn't help but listen to what he wasn't saying. After some prompting, he told me he'd moved three times during the semester trying to find somewhere affordable to stay. So even when he was in class, his head was outside of the classroom, busy with the stresses in his life. It struck me just how much anxiety students were experiencing about their programs, their families, about getting sick, about finances and multiple other things.

After that first assignment, I decided that for the first ten minutes of class we'd do a drawing activity. My hope was to help them transition from their daily challenges into the quiet space of the classroom. I gave them markers and paper, and asked them to draw, slowly, a large spiral going inwards and then starting at the middle over the original spiral, to draw another going outwards.

They did this several times. Their enthusiastic and positive reaction to this activity took me by surprise. Several students told me they drew the spirals again at home. Others told me they shared the activity. Recently, months after the class ended, another sent me a photo of his spirals pinned up next to his computer. Students reported they felt calmer and more in control. I introduced other drawing activities related to research (draw your research as a tree; draw your research as a theatre/stage) but the spiral had the biggest response. I think what happens with drawing like this is that students become more present in their bodies, instead of fretting in their heads. The spiral was soothing, satisfying, and restful. I could see this because as they started drawing, the classroom went quiet. No one was on their phones or computers. No one spoke. All you could hear were the peaceful sounds of markers on paper.

Christine's Narrative

"Anisha, what stood out to you in this course and were there any surprises?"

"Well, what stood out to me was the amount of self-reflection involved. This is something that I often employ in my day-to-day work with students, especially when building rapport with student leaders, and it was refreshing to do this in an academic sphere. I tend to thrive most when I'm able to connect my own self-reflection with experiences in the field and promising practices located throughout the literature."

"That's wonderful!"

"What surprised me the most was how much I enjoyed having the chance to do something different than just writing a paper or literature review for assessment! I really appreciated being able to write a narrative through the 'Students' Voices' assignment because the way it was structured challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and not just learn, but also feel students' experiences. This assignment allowed for creativity, but the creativity came from subject knowledge and in-depth research. It was a great opportunity to get inside the mind of a student and spend a day with them on campus. This was the most meaningful assignment of my university career and I was surprised (ashamedly so) by the amount of knowledge student services professionals must have to play a successful part in postsecondary institutions."

Within my ED 6841 Student Development Theory, Services and Programs in Post-Secondary Education course, I request that my students engage in narrative writing and perspective taking as they consider various student populations'/communities' living and learning experiences. The "Students' Voices" assignment provides students with an opportunity to walk around campus in the shoes of several student populations/communities and contemplate available service and support provisions. Students write in narrative form what a day in the life of a student from the selected background might be like, including their roles and responsibilities, coursework and programs, relationships, (un)involvement in activities, study habits, work commitments, and attending to children/other dependents, etc. Students are asked to envision the voice selected, as each postsecondary campus has a variety of students with different concentrations and circumstances. Students explore issues of identity, age, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Through their narratives, students make connections and reveal many attributes about themselves and their upbringings, which lead to richer conversations in the course.

This powerful and meaningful arts-based creative writing technique breaks down the barriers present in traditional academic assignments. I have learned a great amount about my students and their lives through this assignment as compared to others, as I am provided the capacity to listen to their relations with the material and its significance. For example, when writing a narrative about a student with a learning disability on campus, one student revealed the struggles she's encountered as a mother of an autistic son and the various considerations for parents and faculty members in postsecondary education. She raised issues regarding transitions between institutions, accommodations, resources, and existing stigmas and successes for students. It's through these personal connections to the material that students are able to apply the student development models and frameworks expressively. Students have revealed that this is an imperative assignment for them within the course, as it leads to an informed understanding of student populations/communities on campuses and informs their work in student services moving forward. Students commented that researching, framing, and packaging the course concepts in narrative form allows them to fully consider the material they've learned and to interact with it in a personal manner. There's an individual attachment to the writing that has been produced because of the thought processes involved.

Julia's Narrative

"I'm not sure what to do at this point, Anna. We'll have to cancel our Café concerts for the rest of the term. Would you let the students know and tell them we'll be in touch when we reopen?"

"Julia, why don't we do them all online? Our musicians will love it and they'll still get a chance to perform and contribute to university life."

"You think they will? You think they'd like to?"

"Absolutely. Everything is moving online now—we might as well, too!"

As the Coordinator of New Student Experience, I'm responsible for the welcome and transition of all first-year students to our university. My team, my students, and I design and implement welcome programming through online, live, and hybrid orientation and welcome programs. As a professional musician I'm passionate about infusing music and art into all that I produce, so it's only natural that I created an arts-based engagement program that encourages all students to participate in the magic of music-making. The Café Concert series supports student talent and engagement through live on-campus musical performances. Students gather, perform, and listen in a university Food Court, the most unlikely of performance venues. Joyful expressions of music ring throughout an otherwise drab space, infusing a sense of excitement and welcome. Additionally, it provides unexpected musical access to wandering busy students who might not have intentionally sought out live artmaking.

The pandemic forced us to quickly pivot online. As an institution, we moved our orientation programs into our online learning shells; we moved important information to our social channels; and we held all our meetings on Webex. Our in-person community music-making was halted. This was one moment when I listened to how student musicians could still perform, share, and experience a *musical* outbreak in this seemingly impossible environment.

Our small reach of students per performance increased to thousands via social media. Musicians also recorded messages of care, friendship, love, and comradeship showcasing a support for each other that otherwise, may not have been expressed. They contributed to their pandemic community in a way that others could not—through beauty, music, and authenticity.

“Anna, I recognize that musicians may want to stay away from live performance for a little while longer so I’m wondering if we can produce some videos again for social release.”

“Um no, Julia, we’re all chomping at the bit to get back at it. I have three acts ready to go and they want to sing and play their recital repertoire for end-of-year. Julia, it’s not a problem. We REALLY WANT TO sing live!”

Resuming a robust Café Concert series in the Food Court is an auditory indicator that our musical community is now back and once again ready to share with the university.

Heather’s Narrative

Loved my MoMA mini-course! Finally, I feel confident about taking my class to a museum and helping them interact and engage with art.

Yeah, I know—I see so much more in a photograph now...

Teaching during the pandemic I discovered the free online offerings of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA): in-depth videos created by qualified educators; related experiential activities; teaching materials; and relevant assessment practices. Created as independent professional development courses for teachers, in my undergraduate primary/elementary art education methods course I used them as guided “mini-courses.” The pre-service teachers chose one of the following: *Art & Ideas: Teaching with Themes*; *Art & Activity: Interactive Strategies for Engaging with Art*; or *Art & Inquiry: Museum Teaching Strategies for Your Classroom*. Students’ written reflections connected their MoMA learning experiences to other course readings and activities. They also discussed them in their online postings. Progression through the mini-courses was self-paced but had to be completed two-thirds of the way through our course. Reshaping some of the other assignments used in previous semesters, I weighted the completion of their mini-course as twenty percent of the total grade.

Similarly, my graduate students in *Biographical Explorations of Teaching and Learning*, all practising educators, chose between the options listed above, or a mini-course focusing on modern art and ideas; photographs; contemporary art; or fashion and design. Some, looking for strategies to use in their classrooms, chose an option designed for teachers, while others wanting to increase their knowledge about art took advantage of the other offerings. The most popular was *Seeing Through Photographs*, which helped with their creative project course assignment. They integrated critical written and creative reflections about their mini-course with course readings and experiences. I weighted the completion of the mini-course at fifteen percent of the total grade.

The students responded very positively to the mini-courses. They noted the close visual examination of world-class artworks; videos depicting real-life activities and discussions about art between teachers and children and youth; the helpful teaching materials such as handouts; and the experiential nature of some of the activities.

The MoMA mini-courses provided quality multimedia course resource alternatives during a time when I couldn't meet face-to-face with my students, and therefore wasn't able to travel with them to an art gallery or to model how to interact with young people about art. Students took the switch to distance learning in their stride, and in their meetings I detected excitement about the mini-courses. In their discussion posts they shared their successes, and I was gratified to read of their pride at completion.

Undergraduate pre-service teachers at our university take only one course in art education; therefore, past students had occasionally spoken of feeling unprepared for teaching art. Additionally, our Master's program doesn't offer an art education specialty. So, while my few courses point to a wonderful world of art, teachers sometimes lacked confidence. Yet, with the addition of a mini-course credential from a prestigious art museum, my students grew bolder. Going forward, they might take more MoMA mini-courses to expand their knowledge and expertise. Finally, the mini-courses introduced students to the array of online mini-credential opportunities which can assist their future professional development.

Emerging Themes

We analyzed the narratives using open and focused coding (Saldana & Omasata, 2018). The first round sought to elicit descriptive codes where we attempted to process the content of the narratives. We used our own words and phrases as descriptors. The second round of coding focused on understanding action, reaction, and interaction in the narratives. Next, we coded for emotions. We looked for language that indicated emotions to explore if this was present in the narratives. Finally, we coded for values to establish our beliefs and perceptions around arts-based teaching and learning practices.

Content of the Narratives

Three of us described using arts-based practices in teaching and learning, while Julia described engaging students through music in her role as a student affairs program administrator. Heather wrote about the challenges of teaching art remotely during the pandemic and the challenges of transferring this usually embodied and experiential class online. Finding a partial solution to the problem by directing students to MoMA mini-courses, she also overheard the lack of confidence in teaching art her students were experiencing and how much the MoMA mini-courses assisted. She noted "excitement," "pride in completion," and confidence—that is they "grew bolder." Christine's narrative focused on an activity her students completed. They were required to "walk around campus in the shoes of several student populations/communities" and view the campus from these new eyes. Students stepped "out of their comfort zones," they were surprised at how they saw campus, and they found narrative writing about their experiences to be "meaningful" and "personal." She listened to the need for connection between student groups, and the need to link personal experience to the content to encourage reflection and meaning. Julia's narrative grappled with how to adapt the key purpose of the Café Concert Series—which was to connect students on campus—once everything went online during the pandemic. Recognising that students needed the "magic of music-making" more than ever, the "seemingly impossible" was overcome and through music, "messages of care" were performed via social media to huge success. More recently, she listened again, and students want music in-person: "to get back at it" and "sing live." Cecile's narrative focuses on a seemingly small event in class where she noticed "a level of distraction,"

anxiety, and stress amongst her students. Challenged to help them “transition from their daily challenges,” she introduced a meditative drawing activity. Students responded positively and seemed to latch onto this activity as a strategy for being “more present in their bodies” and for coping. We all used some form of arts-based approach in our practice, even though these varied widely.

Processes and Actions

In Heather’s narrative, she grappled with how to bring art knowledge to pre-service and practicing educators. She wanted these hesitant teachers of art to make connections and to “interact and engage with art.” But how to do this practically in an online environment? Linking their MoMA learning experiences into the course activities allowed her to reshape these educators’ perceptions of art teaching, “focusing on strategies to use in their classrooms.” In doing so, their confidence in teaching art increased. Christine wanted to build “rapport” and “self-reflection” and to make the course content “meaningful.” She wanted students to live their learning and to experientially understand the “stigmas” experienced by some student groups. Students reflected in narrative writing and indicated that they enjoyed this creative arts-based practice, which was experienced as “most meaningful.” Julia’s narrative is about pivoting and moving music-making online and then back to in-person again in response to student needs. Her aim with the music was to connect students with a “sense of excitement” and the “joyful expressions of music” in an “otherwise drab space” to instill a sense of belonging and to nurture a connected campus community. Cecile’s narrative shows a response to inaction on the part of students and listening to what a student “wasn’t saying.” Her activity was an attempt to understand and to connect in the face of disconnection and absence. While we all had different intentions, an overarching intention was to connect with students, to evoke a response from them, and make learning more expressive.

Emotions

The emotions Heather heard in her narrative revolved around “feeling unprepared” and lack of “confidence.” Later this changed to “excitement.” When students “shared their successes,” Heather “was gratified,” noting “their pride” and that “students grew bolder.” For Christine, students reacted to her arts-based activity with “refreshing,” “appreciated,” “challenged me,” “great opportunity,” and “powerful and meaningful.” There was a shift from comfort into a state of newness and an appreciation of this novel point of view. Julia’s narrative reflects the hesitant, cautious, doubtful approach to moving music online and then the “joyful expression,” “the magic of music-making,” and “messages of care, friendship, love, and comradery.” She shifted from feeling unsure about how to respond, to enthusiastic, then back to unsure, and once again to enthusiastic. Cecile’s emotions ranged from perplexed to empathic. Her students’ emotions went from stressed and anxiety-filled to being “more present in their bodies instead of fretting in their heads” and “peaceful sounds.” This snapshot from our narratives shows that there were changes in emotions through arts-based activities. Our emotions shifted, as well as those of students.

Values

In all our narratives, there is an emphasis on adapting to student needs. That is, we focused on what we saw they needed. We sought a connection of some kind. Heather wanted to connect educators to art, the beauty of art, and the excitement of teaching art. Christine wanted to connect

students to course content in an original way. Julia wanted to connect the campus community to music and through music to each other. Cecile wanted to connect students to the quiet space in her classroom, a respite from the crises happening in the world around them. Student-focused arts-based learning was a key theme across the narratives, and the purpose of these practices was connection of some form. Another value that resonated throughout the narratives was adaptability and flexibility. This is associated with our responsiveness to students. Shifting to remote teaching and learning practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and back again required some nimble maneuvering, but our narratives show that when we listened to students, we were prepared to respond in ways we had not planned. Being flexible and adaptive can be challenging, but it seemed that arts-based practices helped us navigate change.

A further value that is apparent in our narratives is the embodied nature of the arts-based practices we used. Heather, in the absence of a tactile art class, found ways to feed her students' senses. Christine made her students physically walk around campus, metaphorically in other students' shoes, and write from their point of view. Julia organized music in "drab spaces," and when that was no longer possible, she moved the music onto social media. Cecile had students choose a colored marker and draw. This embodied approach was valued by all of us, and it seemed important in the context of the pandemic to have these embodied exercises.

Finally, all our arts-based practices valued an aesthetic—the beauty of the practice. Heather's students reveled in immersing themselves in the world of professional art. Christine's activity shook students out of their usual way of seeing and increased "their capacity to listen" and their creativity. Julia's narrative is full of the joy of music and the excitement that accompanies music performance. Cecile's narrative is about the breathing that accompanies meditative drawing and the soothing sounds of markers on paper.

Concluding Thoughts

We engaged in this study to examine our arts-based teaching and learning practices and explore what we have gleaned from these experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to examine the "imaginative devices" (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015, p. 8) we use in our teaching and learning that allow us to deeply listen to our students and to hear what they are communicating, not just on the surface when they want to be heard, but during those unguarded vulnerable moments. Overall, we found our practices to be important for three reasons.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that we need to pay attention to the mental health of our students (Copeland et al., 2021). We have long known that students who feel connected to their institution and have feelings of well-being are more likely to do well and persist in their studies (Tinto, 2017). If students believe they can succeed and cope with the demands they face, they are more likely to remain engaged in their studies. Learning how to manage the social and emotional side of learning is an important awareness. Social and emotional learning (SEL) has become increasingly important (Turki et al., 2018). SEL is about assisting students so that they persist in their programs even under difficult circumstances (Turki et al., 2018). Building the development of mindsets and skills into course content and curricula for students to manage their emotions to achieve personal and work goals would be an example of SEL. Curricula might also include aspects of developing relationship skills, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and self-management (Elmi, 2020; Lubit & Lubit, 2019; Reicher, 2010). Understanding how students deal

with adversity, whether minor or major, can help explain the challenges students face and the linked disaffection and disengagement that reduce chances of student success. Martin and Marsh (2009) suggest a strengths-based approach to facing academic adversity where students learn to be more resilient. What the pandemic has taught us is that we need to help students develop coping strategies and mechanisms to help regulate and reduce negative emotions. The pandemic has introduced quarantine restrictions, economic deprivation, isolation, and many other social and emotional changes. The prolonged nature of the pandemic has exacerbated the usual stressors students encounter (Rogowska et al., 2021). All of our narratives focus on student well-being in one form or another; that is, we chose arts-based activities and practices to address students' social and emotional learning. This indicates a recognition that arts-based practices are well equipped to support students, as they provide opportunities and outlets for expression and release from stressors.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown us that students need connection. In an online crowdsourcing data collection exercise, Statistics Canada (2020) recorded experiences from over 100,000 postsecondary students. They reported many disruptions including coursework cancellations or postponements, as well as financial and employment concerns, in addition to general anxiety about the future. It is this context of change and disruption that has exacerbated the need for connection. Effective arts-based practices in education rely on authentic connection, not only with our students, but also with each other. In formal institutional spaces, especially online, finding moments of meaningful connection is challenging but critical to students' curricular and cocurricular success in and out of the classroom, particularly during a pandemic (Tinto, 2017). Here we focus on full present moments. We have found that arts-based practices are a way to connect to the personal and to the communal. The practical value of arts-based practices lies in the ability to integrate and expand existing boundaries and to encourage collaborations. The arts can embody and effectively integrate a variety of differences, demonstrating an "empathetic knowledge that is effective in communicating emotional aspects of social life" (Chilton & Leavy, 2015, p. 407). We integrated arts-based activities and practices as a means of allowing students to connect with others in their courses and communities. Students were encouraged through these practices to learn more about their colleagues by taking perspectives, sharing their talents and voices, and engaging with the arts community in new ways. The connections we witnessed included spiral drawings that were linked to decompression and shared moments of silence for graduate students; narratives that were linked to equity, diversity, inclusion, and identity intersectionality recognition for student services professionals; social media music performances and care messages that were linked to building campus community and culture through authenticity for undergraduate students; and MoMA mini-courses that were linked to pedagogical confidence and competence for pre-service and practicing teachers.

Third, what we learned through this process is the importance of deep listening. Finding moments of connection is not only challenging, but it also requires careful listening as we endeavor to be fully present in spaces that are rarely personalized. Being guarded means that we are often careful about how we present ourselves to each other and to the world as we edit our vulnerable selves out of our shared frame of reference. One of the most vocal proponents of deep listening is composer Pauline Oliveros (2005), who suggests multiple levels of listening, including culturally and socially. Listening is different from hearing, and deep listening requires focus and effort, but it helps us to make peace with ourselves and to connect with others. As we learn to listen, we build relationships with others, compassion grows, and we can build communities (Pavlicevic & Impey,

2013). Deep listening does this because we “hear the emotions of the other” (’t Hart, 2021, p. 2). Such listening is active. Arts-based practices can promote deep listening through multiple ways of knowing, an emphasis on nonverbal communication, and the way the arts can express the inexpressible. By delving into “imaginative devices” (Potter & Wuetherick, 2015, p. 8) we look at ourselves and each other with new eyes, soft ones, and hope that we begin to notice the world in a different way.

Finally, similar to Riessman (2008), we argue that narratives and arts-based practices can do political work. They can promote a way of knowing that is collaborative and can foster a sense of belonging. As a group of colleagues, we feel validated by this process of collaborative writing about our arts-based practices, and as a result we are eager to continue to take risks, trust our intuition, and to experiment further.

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