

## Añorando el cruce

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### RESUMEN

En Estados Unidos, hay una fuerte tendencia por desarrollar e implementar cursos mixtos – presenciales y virtuales – en la enseñanza superior. Los centros se están preparando para dar respuesta a esta cuestión a través de una variedad de programas, poniendo en marcha, periódicamente, procesos educativos en las facultades. De cualquier manera, y a pesar de los esfuerzos realizados, y de la oferta de programas, son muchos los que sienten inseguridad a la hora de diseñar y pensar cursos virtuales algo diferente a como simples repositorios de datos. Saber usar los programas tecnológicos no lo es todo. El primer paso es volver a pensar el significado de enseñar y aprender. Este artículo describe la reconceptualización de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje que, periódicamente, se desarrolla en un seminario mixto en educación artística usando la tecnología.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación artística, Evaluación, Pedagogía, Tecnología.

## Longing for the Mongrel

### ABSTRACT

Throughout the United States, there is a strong push for development and implementation of hybrid (blended) and online courses in higher education. Campuses attach themselves to a variety of programs to assist this occurrence, and training for faculty on how to use the programs happen regularly. However, despite the call to do it, and the offering of the tools, many are still left uncertain on how to move an imagined online course beyond repositories of data. Knowing how to use tools of technology is not enough. The first step is to revisit what it means to teach and learn. This article describes the reconceptualization of teaching and learning that is ongoing in the implementation of a hybrid seminar course in art education by a technology trainee.

**KEY WORDS:** Art education, Assessment, Pedagogy, Technology.

## Introducción

*“Teach art educators on-line? Not possible. The learning that occurs in the classroom is essential to growth as an educator—the modelling of professional practice, mediation of discussion, and sharing of ideas wouldn’t translate to the virtual classroom”.*

*a Professor of Art Education*

This quote expresses the view of many in higher education when considering teaching a hybrid or on-line course. Despite this view, the need to incorporate hybrid and on-line courses in the university settings is growing more critical. Larger student populations and decrease in funding make the virtual classroom more desirable, particularly for those looking at the long-term future of the university system. Though the need is present, there lacks a significant understanding of what must happen in the virtual classroom to maintain quality of teaching and learning. Appreciating both the need for this hybrid education, and the necessity of modelling sound pedagogy and practice in work with pre-service teachers, I initiated a hybrid course in Art Education, asking the simple questions: *How will this hybridization of pedagogy and practice impact quality of learning, and, how will this hybridization change my own understanding of teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

## Background and History

For nearly a decade I have worked serving pre-service teachers in the field of Art Education at three different universities in the United States. The majority of my teaching has occurred in a traditional classroom, with the exception of the teaching and learning that occurs while evaluating pre-service teachers during their practicum experience.

My conception of learning is that it is a value-laden, deeply contextualized process. Each new thought, idea, and experience needs to be bridged to what exists in the individual learner. A teacher in training will learn about various approaches to classroom management, but without understanding the human needs engaged by a classroom management plan, any new plan is disjointed and unabsorbed. Students (teachers in training, and ultimately their students) learn better when offered the space to understand and imagine what theories, ideas, and philosophies look like in practice. I feel that students are able to explore and critically examine new information and experiences when given the support and autonomy to do so. As the learning experiences are anchored in personal values and contexts, the learner can begin to take ownership of their understandings. With that ownership comes empowerment.

My research focuses on assessment of quality in the art classroom, and that extends to my own teaching. I believe that I change as a teacher with each course, each class. I invite students to offer suggestions both about the course content and my style of teaching, and work to respond to those suggestions through changes in my curriculum and reflecting on my teaching practices, making changes when needed. My teaching has improved from student suggestions, and I have seen student learning deepen as they see their concerns and ideas implemented in the classroom. I am committed to being an active member in professional communities so that my understandings and ideas of teaching, learning, research, and the field of art education continue to evolve.

That evolution occurred suddenly in terms of using technology to promote quality learning. I began a new position at Kennesaw State University as Assistant Professor of Art Education. My charge was to supervise student teachers, and have them attend four to five seminar sessions over the course of the semester. The thought of so little classroom time spent together greatly concerned me. My work with previous students led to the understanding that having time to collaborate and share experiences during the transition from student to professional is critical. I quickly decided that we would meet for five seminar sessions on campus, and develop a virtual community to meet the needs for collaboration and sharing of experiences. And, the decision was made with no formal training in technology or in how to use technology to promote learning and collaboration. This hybrid course is the focus of this reflection.

## Initial Perspective

When I entered the field of education “using technology” meant typing your lesson plans on the computer and possibly adding a power point presentation to introduce lessons. I had a very limited encounter with technology and art-making in a new media course. During this course it took over seven hours to download 45 seconds of video. By the end of the course, I was more convinced that there was no place for computers in art making and art teaching. Over the years I was dismayed by the growing trend to teach in the virtual classroom, and hoped it would be a passing fad. I am an art educator. I value the organic learning experiences that occur when learners seek understanding in a shared space. I value a flexible curriculum, open to the ever-changing concepts of teaching in today’s

public schools. How could this ever translate to the virtual classroom? I was overwhelmed not only by the multitude of platforms and approaches to teaching on-line, but even more so by the lack of understanding how an educator could assess the quality of this approach in comparison to the traditional classroom.

Later I realized that this was part of the misconception in thinking of teaching and learning in a virtual space; it cannot be compared to the traditional classroom. Nor, can the approach to teaching in either scenario be compared. They are different creatures. And, when the two meet, a new mongrel is born. A mongrel of pedagogy and a mongrel of practice.

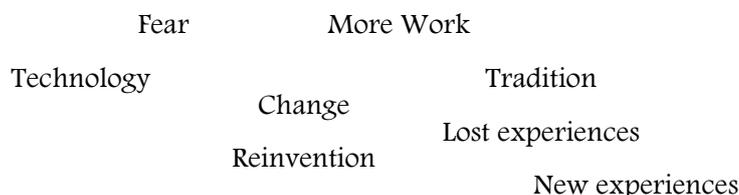
## (Lack) of Review of Literature

Like most faculty entering the realm of hybrid/online teaching, I did not dedicate a research project to discover the impact of this approach on quality of teaching and learning. Campuses offer instruction on how to use the platforms of choice, often with no mention of shift in thinking of how the classroom works in a virtual world. Fortunately, I worked closely with a professor whose specialty was in the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning. For more than a year, casual conversation centered on the philosophy behind using computers to support better communication and understanding. I was still hesitant. How could a faculty member outside the field of CSCL possibly design a course the right way? I envisioned what it might be, but with no grounding and experience, it was only a vision.

## Methods

Grounded in reflective practice and Performative reflection, I spent three months assessing the quality of the teaching and learning practices in this new hybrid course. The insights and changes are mirrors of our charge as educators—to evolve as selves and constantly focus on greater quality in learning. In this section, I present the reflective practice as Performative reflection, offering greater understanding of the participants, the setting, and the themes that have evolved in the process of this experience.

## The Longed for the Mongrel



*I will develop a hybrid course. I really have no option, as I cannot require students to meet regularly throughout the semester. I can ask them to attend campus seminar five times. How do I establish the sense of shared experience and foster the ignition of serving one another as flourishing new colleagues???*

### *Play Overview*

The setting is southern United States, year 2009, Kennesaw State University (KSU). KSU is located near Atlanta, Georgia. It is the third largest university system in Georgia, and serves over 22,000 students through 70 bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs. The student population has almost doubled in size from the mid-90's to 2009. Originally a two-year junior college, the university is now receiving more attention nationally as an "Up and Coming University." At this mid-sized teaching-oriented university, the call for hybrid and online courses is growing more emphatic by the day. The University has written it into their mission, and deans across campus are strategic in their approach to beckon faculty to alter their teaching approach.

A new faculty member joins the College of the Arts. She is an art educator. Her experiences with using the computer have focused on data processing, surviving a new media studio course (holding firm until the end that computers limited the creative process), and, of course, the ability to use endless power points for "better presentations" at professional conferences. However, the year prior to her start at this new university, she had the opportunity to work with a faculty member from the University of Valladolid. Through ongoing informal conversations and workshops, she began to imagine a classroom outside of four walls; a classroom where it was more than "teaching with technology;" a classroom where computers supported the collaboration she saw key to the learning process. She began to imagine a new mongrel: a birth parented by her traditional experiences and the experiences of quality blended education.

As she joined faculty at this university, the stage seemed right for her to initiate what she had only months before learned to dream of.

*I have worked with teachers in training for over 8 years, and at three universities. This particular course is unlike any other. It is the “capstone” course; students teach full time in the classroom, and meet for course seminars on scheduled dates. It is the course in which they put into practice all their years of coursework; it is the semester they transition from student to professional. And, it can be a very lonely time, isolated from the normal social structure of constant peer camaraderie.*

### *Setting*

Four classrooms (of sorts): a conference room at KSU; 11 schools serving as practicum sites; our virtual meeting space; and, the space where we are positioned to engage in reflection, planning, and decision. *The learning that occurs at each of these sites cannot be evaluated in a meaningful way using quantitative measures.*

### *Props*

GeorgiaView, Wikispace

### *Actors*

Assistant Professor of Art Education; 11 female pre-service art education students currently enrolled in their capstone course--student teaching. Ages ranging from 22 to 54. All actors have limited formal virtual learning experiences.

### *Backstage*

Stage fright. Anxieties for newcomers to using computer support to encourage and aid the learning experience. Anxieties for students wanting more of a “to-do list” for when/where/how to contribute. Anxieties for faculty member while imagining 12 “owners” of a collaborative site.

### *The show*

Drama  
Comedy  
Satire

### *Scene 1*

#### Experiential Learning, Assessment, and the Unexpected

I don't understand the new experience that students have in today's classrooms. Elementary aged children can easily surpass me in their abilities to maneuver tools of technology. And yet, I am here. I am here to continue supporting those who are committed to the field of education. The forms of support are changing, as must I.

While experiential learning has been my commitment, I cannot fathom what it means in the virtual world. I know it happens. But, more often than not, the happenings are measured by numbers: how many students enrolled in and successfully completed the hybrid or on-line course; how did students succeed compared to those in the traditional classroom; what platforms are measurably marked as more successful than others?

Those are not the criteria I use to evaluate success of learning. In the past I have relied on physical observation: body language, eye contact, questions, and overheard conversations. This does not exist in the virtual classroom. But, the distinctive personalities emerging in the course do allow insight into the quality of the learning experience. While I previously relied on multiple forms of assessment to understand a student's ability to interpret, evaluation and express, I now am confined to their literacy capabilities.

Literacy is essential in education. Communicating ideas in writing, and responding to what is offered in words, is critical in indicating the ability to assess, nurture, mediate, and promote growth in the classroom. Restricted from my traditional understanding of learning and assessment, the understanding of the implications of literacy via use of a hybrid course have had significant impact. I have come to realize that the students who struggle most in their abilities to express themselves in written form—through assignments, blogging, and feedback—have also been the students who struggle most with ability to plan instruction and engage in meaningful dialog with students.

I had no formal intention of assessing their literacy when designing the hybrid course, but the constant data cannot be ignored. This has led to an even greater expectation of pre-service teachers in their abilities to communicate with the professional world—their students, colleagues, and administrators.

For some, the shared, safe space has encouraged a sense that they can be completely revealing. While transparency is appreciated on some levels, they are in a time of transition in understanding that to be part of a profession one must also understand how to adopt both language and custom of that profession. Overall, their understanding of content and practice is sound and well-rounded, this integral component of literacy is possibly in need of most support.

### *Intermission*

It is important to note that prior to my initiation of the hybrid design of the course, the students in the course had established a Facebook forum. Closed to the public, they shared struggles, successes, and complaints about teaching and life. Because of this, the idea of a virtual shared space was not foreign to them. However, the ownership of the space was slow. Three students of eleven contributed regularly early on, while others were more hesitant. The leaders in the initiation of change and contribution to our wiki were also the most vocal during our time together in seminar. And, were the students that received highest reports from collaborating teachers about their ability to have initiative.

We began the course using GeorgiaView; the platform adopted by our university for hybrid and on-line endeavors. While committed to staying in-line with the decisions of the university, I found the platform serve better as a repository of documents than shared space of growth and knowledge generation. Two weeks after the start of the semester we shifted to using a wikispace. While perhaps quaint and informal, this platform allowed for shared ownership.

The members of the course and I brainstormed on why and how we could use this space for teaching, learning, and collaboration. While I initiated a great portion of the layout of the space, including pages, organization, and protocol, others followed quickly to provide feedback and initiate on how to make the space better serve our needs.

What ensued was a high traffic space that most students regularly visited. While serving as a soul source of data collection (including teaching philosophies, resumes, classroom management plans, samples of student work and lesson plans), the space became alive with regular blog posts, contributions of new ideas, additions of other web spaces to serve as inspiration, and a place for thoughtful self-reflection and peer review.

### *Scene 2*

#### *Transformed Community*

*Today third graders were doing a lesson on Japanese landscapes. They are using watercolor paints to make a landscape scroll. One student (student J) made inappropriate remarks all throughout class. When I asked a student to come to the Promethean board to answer a question he snarled and said, "Why'd you pick the Asian girl first?" She wasn't even Asian! I had to tell him, "Excuse you, but everyone gets an equal chance to answer in this classroom and that was very unnecessary." I always pick boy, girl, boy, girl, or if a girl just went I ask her to "pick a very quite boy who hasn't gone yet". Anyway, after we start doing the project I hear student J say that he is "tired of studying about and hates Asia." A girl sitting next to him said, "hey I am part Asian!" He remarked back to her, "Jump off a cliff!" I told him, "Enough is enough! You have said inappropriate things all class and it's stopping now!" There is not much I can do in the Art Room about behavior like this. Like I said the students here really have no repercussions for inappropriate behavior except a note being written to their parents, then their parents sign it (or in most cases their guardian, foster parent, etc. forget to sign it). Anyhow, how do I approach behavior like this? I find it highly inappropriate. I know that most of the time it could be things the student has heard around him or at home. I've never really had to correct behavior as such so I was wondering what would be the best approach. (response from Cheryl)*

*So sorry! Maybe use this as a teachable moment - tell the child how that makes you feel. Good for the whole class to hear. He's testing you by intentionally pushing your buttons - like poking you with a stick to see how you'll react. I have two high-school students who do the same thing, but they're more subtle (response from April)*

*Brandi, I had a similar situation happen. I was working with a class when a student asked, "Why are you only calling on white kids?" I was completely taken aback, and realized that yes, I had only called on Caucasian children, but that outside of that, I had only called on children with their hands raised (and all happened to be Caucasian). While it took me aback, I realized that the sense of difference in the class was very strong. I agree completely with Cheryl, that experiences like that are teachable moments. And, I understand your frustration that the only consequence is a note home. However, having a serious conversation with a student (or the whole class) about difference could be crucial in his learning of what is appropriate, not only in the classroom, but in his understanding and appreciation of peers. Could you use this as a platform for a future lesson?*

While my initial concern was lack of time to share experiences, the wikispace has afforded members of the course a greater space for community. While course “time” limitations often make it impossible to address critical experiences, the hybrid design has allowed us to not only share, but reflect, and respond, in a meaningful way. Often students wait days to respond to a post, and other offer comments right away. The previous sample was one of many shared by members.

Some students chose not to respond. One nonresponsive member indicated that she needed a more clear definition of the requirements for grading. I stressed, perhaps too generally, the expectation that students “own” the learning in the site, I also included a “contribute two, respond one” rule. The majority of students had no need for the rule, but for those hesitant to participate, it offered a platform for engaging in the space.

#### *Applause*

Because of the charge of my university to engage in hybrid and on-line practice, I have received great support for the initiative. And, because of the minimal face-to-face classroom time required for student teachers, the majority of students have greatly appreciated the hybrid efforts, feeling more connected than if weeks passed between collaborative efforts and shared experiences.

#### *Encore?*

As the semester nears end, I have decided to continue with the hybrid course design for the next semester. Of course, changes will be made. Many issues were surprisingly resolved by utilizing the on-line aspect of the course, and, other issues emerged. These are discussed at length later in the paper.

#### *The review(s)*

*“A lot of student teachers in other areas that I speak with haven’t accomplished near what we have in our course. Because the issues we needed to address were constantly visible [through our wiki], I have been able to work at my own pace, and have never been surprised by the expectations or objectives.”*

*“I don’t want to share my work on the wiki. I worked very hard on these pieces... (fading), and, well, don’t want to share them with others.”*

*“I like having access to everything I need, when I need it. I don’t have to wait for the next meeting, or next assignment, because it’s all there for me, whenever I am ready.”*

## **Issues**

During my reflection it has become clear to me that quality teaching and learning can occur virtually. Perhaps more significant, there are aspects of learning that may occur *better* in a virtual classroom. My conception of teaching and learning has shifted with an unexpected level of complexity. During this reflective practice I recognized that the assessment of learning evolved, and that these pre-service teachers demonstrated their learning experience on multiple levels. Several issues emerged in this reflective practice: the ability to virtually assess professionalism of pre-service teachers; the added component of vulnerability in the sharing of ideas and assignments; and, the bound-less space for self-reflection and assessment.

#### *Assessment of Professionalism*

Students in this course were comfortable communicating with one another in a virtual space. Their ongoing Facebook forum allowed them to be perhaps even more straightforward and honest in their reflections of their experiences in the transition from student to professional.

I made clear from the beginning that this space was a *professional collaborative site* hoping to raise expectations of what was shared. This is much easier to mediate in a “live” environment. And still, several students used the site as a sounding board for complaints. While it is necessary to share struggles with others in similar experiences, the boundary was perhaps too vague. Nonetheless, I realized that I had stressed the “safety” of our virtual space, just as I would a traditional classroom experience. Because of the safety, students demonstrated their understanding of what it meant to be part of a professional collaborative endeavor. As mentioned, several students contributed anecdotes and perspectives that were not acceptable in a regular professional environment; but, this was not a regular environment at all. It was our hybrid classroom. And, as in any classroom, there are struggles to define boundaries of what is acceptable.

#### *Vulnerable Sharing*

Unlike most courses, when students submitted work it was not only for the instructor to view. This added component of accountability challenged many members, and left two members barely contributing. While regularly offering general feedback, I assessed submitted work individually, and delivered the response in the same manner. I often posted samples of student work with feedback, for

students to better understand expectations. As I appreciated the need for modeling, at the same time I worried that students were still looking for a “to-do list” in the learning experience. Students seemed to appreciate that my critique of their work was private; this practice was absolutely influenced by the more traditional approach to classroom. However, this did leave me to wonder what level of quality would be sought if my comments and critique of work was explicitly shared.

#### *The Bound-less Space*

Because of the unique nature of this course, it was imperative that students felt a part of a larger growing body of professionals. In past experiences, students often asked if we could meet for seminar beyond what was schedule, evidencing need to communicate with others in the transition. This was my primary concern in shifting to a hybrid course design. How would that sense of collaboration and shared experience translate virtually?

Previously, too often seminar time was absorbed by the need for student teachers to share their experiences; experiences that were necessary to appreciate and evaluate as newcomers to a field of practice. Our hybrid course allowed for much greater space for this sharing, and many members utilized the forum for that purpose. While the confines of the classroom in terms of time allotment often squashed both sharing of experiences, and response from peers, the hybrid space allowed for students to share as much as they desired. And, allowed peers to respond in the same manner.

### **The Continued Hibridization**

My own understanding of teaching and learning is in a constant state of hybridization. Even while writing these words I wrestle with not comparing the traditional and virtual classrooms. I have come to recognize that to facilitate the virtual learning space is even more time consuming than preparing for a traditional course session. I feel compelled to be constantly available, as our learning space breathes and evolves constantly. With some guilt I admit that I struggle to know when is the “right” time to allow their discourse to go untouched. As in the case when the boundaries of professional contribution blurred, I hesitated to intervene, balancing their understanding of the safety of the “class” with my own expectations that the contributions transition from a social space to a professional landscape.

While some students, as in any forum of learning, more readily contribute than others, this learning experience has allowed a new freedom from the confines of the traditional classroom. Students were able to engage at their own pace, and own their learning experience in ways quite unlike what I have witnessed in previous course environments.

### **Persistent Reconceptualization of the Mongrel**

As we embark on the journey of what it means to teach and support in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is evident that a shift in our concept of teaching and learning should occur. This shift has been ongoing in pedagogy and practice, but now we are faced with a new charge, one that leaves many of us uncomfortable. We must not only commit to understanding the technology that is present and ever-transforming, we must commit to an appreciation of a new concept of teaching and learning in this era. Change is challenging. The unknown mongrels that might emerge are frightening. And yet, if we are committed to service, and committed to quality in education, we should embrace the challenging mongrel that may emerge. And, celebrate our commitment to being reflective, responsive, 21<sup>st</sup> century practitioners, eager to ignite and support learning in any form.