

WORKSHOP 3

Writing the Other: Becoming or Letting Be

“Of course, no one is truly normal. Acknowledging the ways in which we deviate from so-called normalcy is an important step in learning to write the other.” Shawi and Ward (2005: p. 3).

Objectives:

1. Explore the reactions to the short story *Axolotl* by Julio Cortázar.
2. Develop a portrait of a partner in silence using a variety of art material focusing on emotions, beauty, qualities seen in the other, and appreciative language.
3. Share a meaningful anecdote between partners and have each of them develop a short story in first person retelling the other’s story.
4. Explore feelings, reactions, and ideas about the self and the other after the activity.

Materials:

1. 4 audio recorders.
2. 1 video camera
3. Researcher’s diary
4. Workshop guide
5. Flip chart paper
6. Notebook/Block per student
7. Pens and pencils per student
8. Markers for flipchart
9. Post-its
10. Feelings chart
11. Art material (paint, brushes, small bowls for water, crayons, markers, colours, pencils)
12. White cardboard for portraits
13. Newspaper to protect surfaces
14. Copies of short story (*Axolotl*, by Julio Cortázar, 1956).

Notes: The last workshop was cut short given several interruptions and logistic matters. Therefore, half of it had to be redone. However, last week, all schedules were changed and students were given a day off, both of which, I wasn’t told about. Therefore, I am a week behind. I have managed to get 4 hours next week, which allows me to finish workshop 2 on April 11th, start with workshop 3 on the same day, finish workshop 3 on Monday, and move on to workshop 4 and 5 the remaining three hours of the week.

Workshop guide:

Before the workshop:

- a. Have the room set up with newspaper on surfaces.
- b. Have a set of paints and brushes per pair of students, as well as a small bowl with water.
- c. Have all art material set up so it is available for everyone to use and choose from.
- d. Give each student a white cardboard.
- e. Have name tags paired up and ready around the material so they know where to sit.
- f. Each two pairs will have an audio recorder.
- g. Have the camera set up and ready to record.
- h. Make sure students have their block, pens and copies of the story *Axolotl*.
- i. Have questions and ground rules done in the previous encounter on the walls where everyone can see it.

1. Introduction to the workshop (5 minutes):

- a. Welcome the students. Summarize what has been done so far: exploring stereotypes in stories and if they can be challenged, and writing stories using images as starting points to help the imagination. Today they will be writing about someone different from them, and for that, they will be paired up.
- b. Today, more than every time we meet, rules must be remembered. All language used throughout the session will be positive, appreciative and will be kept confidential. They will be sharing an event/anecdote in their lives that they consider significant, and for that, trust must be maintained at all times.
- c. Explain the objectives of the workshop to all the students and answer questions before beginning.

2. Reading the story (25 minutes):

- a. **Vocabulary:** Explain to students what an Axolotl is.
- b. **Reading:** Give the students **15 minutes** to read the story silently. Ask them to underline quotes that pop up for them for whatever reason (they don't understand, they found it interesting, it made them question something, it reminded them of something...). Have these reasons written on *flipchart paper*.

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- c. **Sharing:** After the time is up, ask them to share in groups of four their reactions and underlined material **(5 minutes)**.
- d. **Common discussion:** Ask one representative from each group to share what was discussed in each group. Answer questions about the story **(5 minutes)**.

3. Portraying the other (40 minutes):

- a. Ask the students if they know what a portrait is. After listening to them, give them the definition: “a painting, drawing, photograph, or engraving of a person, especially one depicting only the face or head and shoulders.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Show them some examples of portraits (Taken from Artsy for Education, 2018). Remind them through the examples that there is no wrong or right way to do a portrait, is not about the ability to draw but about the use of colors, form and lines/traces that bring emotion and meaning to what you want to say. **(10 minutes)**
- b. Explain to the students they will be doing an exercise of observation, an imitation of what the author did and experienced in Axolotl. In pairs, they will be observing each other in silence for **3 minutes**. Although laughter might happen, ask them to try and focus as much as they can. As they do the exercise, ask them to focus on (*have them written in flipchart paper*):
 - i. Emotions they experience and emotions they perceive in the other.
 - ii. Features they perceive as beautiful and unique in the other.
 - iii. Thoughts the other must be having (in general or in that moment).
 - iv. Imagining how their lives must be like when they are not together.
- c. After 3 minutes have gone by, explain they have available a series of art materials to sketch a portrait of the other. This exercise must be done in silence and music can be played in the background. Once they are finished, they should write words that represent answers to the questions in the flipchart, around the portrait. **(30 minutes)**.

4. Anecdotes (20 minutes – 10 minute interviews):

- a. Leave the portraits to dry. Ask the students, still in pairs, to share with each other the significant anecdote they were asked to think about at the beginning of the session. To do this, remind them of trust and use of appreciative language. Before they share, tell them the objective will be to retell their partner’s anecdote using the first person point of view.
- b. Have in the flipchart the following questions to help them probe for information:
 - i. What happened?

- ii. Who was involved?
 - iii. When did it happen?
 - iv. Where did it happen?
 - v. Why was it important/significant for you?
 - vi. What did you think?
 - vii. How did you feel?
 - viii. How did you act/react?
- c. Ask them to interview each other and take notes on their partner's answers and anecdotes.

5. Writing the other (20 minutes):

- a. The students will have 20 minutes to write their partner's anecdote in first person. All the questions in the flipcharts are important and provide valuable information to make sure you capture the essence of the other's experience. You are the Axolotl. This narrative will accompany the portrait you made **(20 minutes)**.
- b. Share your narrative with your partner, ask them for changes, approval, important details you might have left out. And work on it 5 more minutes if need be **(5 minutes)**.

6. Closing (10 minutes): Ask a couple of volunteers to share their result with the group. Ask everyone to please fill out the exit slip with the following three questions:

- a. Did I learn something about my partner today I had not seen/noticed before? If yes, what?
- b. Can writing help us see others differently? Explain your answer.
- c. Can writing the other help us see ourselves differently? Explain your answer.

7. References:

Artsy for Education (2018) *Lesson Plan #1: The Portrait*. Available online in <https://www.artsy.net/article/theartgenomeproject-lesson-plan-number-1-the-portrait>. Consulted on 3 April 2018.

Cortázar, J. (1956) Axolotl. En *Final del juego*. Available online in: <http://www.literatura.us/cortazar/axolotl.html>. Consulted on 22 February 2018.

Oxford Dictionary (2018) *Portrait*. Available online in <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/portrait>. Consulted on 3 April 2018.

Shawl, N. and Ward, C. (2005) *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*. Conversation Pieces Series, Book 8. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press.

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original image can be found at:
<http://www.matissepaintings.org/blue-nude-ii/>

Henri Matisse

Blue Nude II, 1952

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
http://art-picasso.com/1931_85.html

Pablo Picasso

Buste de femme au chapeau (Dora) (Bust of Woman with Hat, Dora), 1939

Fondation Beyeler

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
<https://www.leopoldmuseum.org/en/collection/highlights/131>

Egon Schiele

Self-Portrait with Bent Head (Study for Eremiten/Hermits), 1912
Sammlung Leopold, Vienna

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
<https://www.oskar-kokoschka.ch/en/1020/1470/Selbstbildnis%201917>

Oskar Kokoschka

Self Portrait, 1917
Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/pablo-picasso-le-reve-the-dream>

Pablo Picasso

Le Rêve (The Dream), 1932

Private Collection

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/91.161/>

Henri Matisse

Femme au chapeau (Woman with a Hat), 1905

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
<https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/portrait-baldassare-castiglione-1478-1529>

Raphael

Count Baldassare Castiglione, author of "Il Cortegiano," the book about the perfect courtier, 1514-1515

Musée du Louvre, Paris

[Image redacted due to copyright issues.]

Original can be found at:
<https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/explore/the-collection/artworks/girl-with-a-pearl-earring-670/detailgegevens/>

Johannes Vermeer

Girl with a Pearl Earring, ca. 1665

Mauritshuis, The Hague