

Faces of Change: Using Masks to Capture a Moment in Time

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The arts engage our senses, provoking strong, affective responses for both the creator and the witness of art. Our emotions can provide a catalyst for informal adult learning beyond traditional, cognitive ways of knowing (Lawrence, 2008).

Introduction

Arts-based learning allows students in disciplines outside of the creative arts to employ artistic skills and experiences to create a project that engages the student in a more sensory type of learning than traditional lecture and practicum courses. It provides a creative outlet for students that engages them in active learning, teaches them how to spend time on a specific task; invites them to respect diversity in all populations and disease processes; and promotes interaction with faculty and collaboration among peers, while providing rapid feedback.

The Assignment

This assignment was presented the first day of class in an introductory communication class required as part of the traditional BSN program. This was done so that the students would have the entire semester to work on this project to be presented the last day of class. Students were invited to comment on the project and ask questions throughout the semester.

The initial directions for the project were purposefully vague. This was to allow the students to use their idea and create a mask that told the story that the student wanted to tell and not the story they were directed to tell. They were given a simple plastic mask and charged to create a face capturing a communication moment in time.

Directions

Your assignment is to make a face of a communication moment in time. Something that encapsulates how a person thinks, feels, and communicates during a specific moment in time. You may use crayons, markers, fabric, jewels, or any other type of craft supply to make your mask. You can choose any of the moment of communication discussed in class. You will need to write a 3-4 page paper (excluding title page, abstract, and references) with at least 4 reference (not the textbooks) that describes your moment in time and why you think it is important to communication. You will also need to present your mask and information during class during one of the last two weeks of class. Each presentation needs to be between 5 and 7 minutes long. Points will be deducted if the paper or presentation are too short or too long.

You have a lot of freedom in this assignment. Be creative! If you have specific questions, ask me. You get to do this assignment the way that you want. It is based on your knowledge of the moment being described and how the communication should be portrayed based on what you learn in the course this semester. I do not want to provide a lot of detailed instructions, because I want this to truly be your project and not what you think I want for this project.

The paper is worth 150 points, so APA and grammar are each worth 15 points. The mask and presentation are worth 200 points. It is important that you take this project seriously, because it is such a big part of your grade. Creativity is important. Skill is not so much. I do not expect you all to be artists, but I do expect you to be able to portray an idea and tell a story.

Outcomes

Students really enjoyed the assignment for the most part. It is obvious that many of them spent a great deal of time in the literature surrounding their chosen moment in time and in the creation of the mask itself. Faces were used to describe the birth of a child, the trauma of having served in the military, the pain of being an abused child, the hidden tortures of having mental illness, the pain of still birth, the face of Alzheimer's, the struggles of dementia, and the face of a mother who finds out she is pregnant following a recent miscarriage.

"I really enjoyed this assignment. It gave me something else to think about besides tests, and it let me be creative." S.P.

"It was fun having an assignment that helped me learn, but it also allowed me to show a part of myself." C.T.

Conclusions

The students in this arts-based learning project were very excited and engaged in the whole creation process. The masks that they designed were incredible. Their presentations describing the moment of communication depicted by their masks were accurate and effective.

Arts-based learning contributes to the scholarship of teaching by providing educators with a way to actively engage students in their learning while providing an outlet for creativity that is frequently missing in other nursing courses. It allows the student to dive into the literature on their proposed mask and then spend time putting their interpretation of what they have learned on a face.

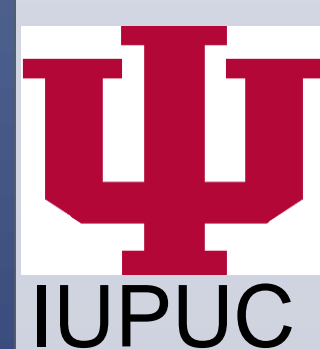
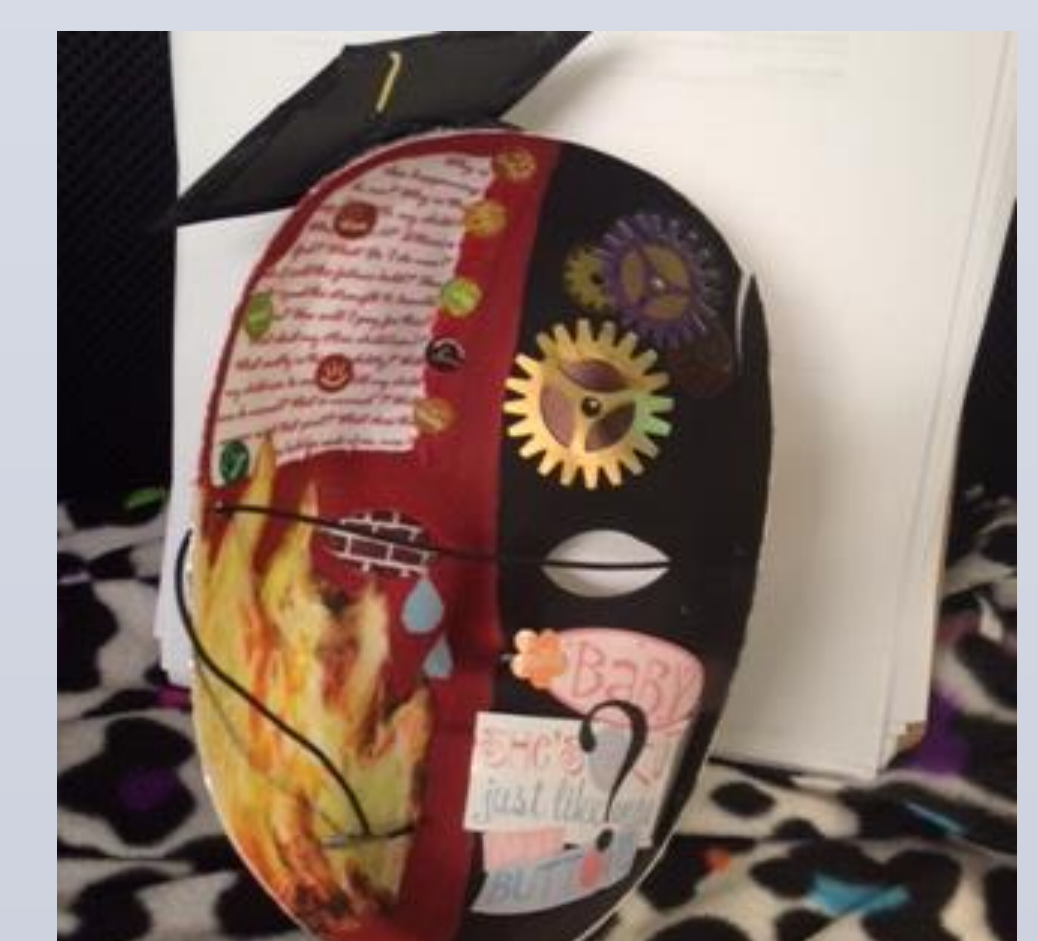
The project has now evolved into an assignment for our healthy populations course, with the students assigned to create a mask that depicts a disparate population. Many have already identified the population and are using it throughout the class. The final mask and accompanying paper will count as a third of their final grade for the course. Using masks as a way of putting a face on health disparity will help the students gain a better understanding of the people who are suffer from health disparity.

References

Lawrence, R. L. (2008). Powerful feelings: Exploring the affective domain of informal and arts-based learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 120*, 65-78. doi:10/1002/ace

The moment a mother learns her child has a disability

The mask shows the ambivalence of being happy to be a mother, but questioning why this had to happen to me.



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