Sensory Literacy and Empowerment in Art and Design

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Insistence on verbal literacy as a key skill occurs throughout education. There needs to be a greater awareness of literacy as a sensory capacity: creative voices are seen, heard and performed. I argue that all the senses form embodied understanding, and obstructing this flow can impede learning. This article questions how we can use embodied, sensory and performative methods to enable student ownership of theoretical and cultural texts. It contributes a theorised approach and transferrable methods for students to build confidence in their learning capacity. I discuss how interpretations of texts can be seen as discourses that are expressed through visualisation, embodiment and affect to empower learning. Practice research with vocational art and design students is explored, to address their expressions of empowerment, in connection with their interpretations of Foucault and Freire. Students' individuated sensory methods of representing empowerment also offer more inclusive possibilities for decolonised cultural ownership through arts practice.

Keywords: art and design, dialogue, embodiment, Foucault, Freire, ownership, practice research, sensory literacy.

Introduction

A view of literacy as verbal dexterity can be tracked through the development of education from the early years (McLachlan & Arrow 2011, Roulstone et al. 2011). I propose that this view needs to be expanded to encompass a sensory approach to literacy, for meaningful learning to take place in our 'reading of the world' (Freire 1998, 23). This article brings into question how we can use embodied, sensory and performative methods to enable student ownership of theoretical and cultural texts. In the case study I will discuss here, a practice research project was planned to investigate how theories of empowerment could be rendered more accessible via sensory arts methods for students in art and design. This project was part of a more extensive study

that questioned how emancipatory philosophy could input to proactive learning in art and design education (Matthews 2018a,b,c, 2019). A significant finding of this research was that sensory literacy was enhanced and expressed through the different modalities of the project – in discourse analysis of class discussions, performative artworks, and the independent development of students' individuated practice (Kara 2020). These findings are the basis for my argument for approaching literacy in education with increased attention to the integration of the senses.

I define 'sensory literacy' as the capacity to communicate affect, ideas and interpretations through the senses – including visuality, sound and embodiment – the body language of movement, haptic and performative interpretation. This approach acknowledges that there are different connective relations for each participant. My research connects with literature on 'multisensory literacy' (Cerkez 2014, Peers 2011, Duncum 2004, Emme 2001), however I use the term 'sensory' to recognise the flux between the senses in our relation to the cultural texts of art and design. My definition of 'sensory literacy' observes that there are different scales of interaction between the senses at certain points: sometimes the visual has more presence in an artwork, sometimes the aural or haptic becomes the major point of connection in learning.

This approach offers creative pedagogies that encourage students' perceptions of their cultural belonging in learning (hooks 2019). I will discuss how the combined vantage points of mixed-media work – for example in photography, drawing, art text and performed embodiment of texts, can create interventions that complement a mixed-methods or 'multi-modal' research methodology (Kara 2020). I have investigated how engagement in collaborative visual and discursive approaches to learning can help students acclimatise to new cultural experience. This research intends to build holistic rather than 'fractured academic identity' (Lithari 2018, 14), in recognising the

significance of existing community and peer cultures, and the value of these associations in 'the aesthetic dimension in everyday life' (Errāzuriz 2019, 17). In practice research I worked with vocational art and design students aged 16-19, to explore ways of building their confidence in learning. As a theoretical lens, and for material to debate I related to Freirian critical pedagogy and Foucauldian power/knowledge theory. There is a gap in research of how theory may be made accessible for students aged 16-19. This article contributes empirical evidence of how visualisation and performative embodiment of cultural texts can challenge attitudes towards the academic capacity of vocational art and design students.

This practice research took place with sixth-form students who were not 'high achievers' before starting vocational studies in art and design. Many of these students lacked confidence in verbal literacy, and their articulation of ideas and material processes in visual language had not yet developed a range of expression. This case study was located in an area of London where there is a vast divide between rich and poor. Over 90% of the students I worked with were global majority, black and people of colour. Most students were attempting to be the first in their family to go to university. My intentions were to look for ways of engaging their attention in learning processes, connecting with their familiar cultural contexts, and to build their confidence in forming representations of the world via practice in art and design.

There is a strong argument to consider all forms of cultural interaction as 'texts' in the making, as experiences of 'being-in-the-world' (Powell 2016, 405), and engagement in dialogue with others. Cultural texts form reflective narratives through sensory connection and emotional response, as well as through critical thinking (Masny 2012). Visual images create a focus for developing interpretation, as 'appreciation ability' (Kim et al. 2017, 318). Additionally, stories structured through images as visual

language can help young people find connections and form positive self-identity in learning (Gritter et al., 2017), as can hearing those stories spoken out loud. I will later discuss artworks in which text takes on visual and performative qualities, and will explore how theoretical texts can be embodied through practice in art and design, to help students take ownership of the significance of their learning.

There are contrasting arguments for maintaining the differences between spoken and written texts, and affective artforms in learning. Without being 'vision-centred' (Cerkez 2014, 278), it is clear that visual, haptic and sound based artforms have additional values to those associated with verbal expression. In making and discussing artwork, a release is provided for communicating affect (Hickey-Moody 2013, Atkinson 2018), nurturing wellbeing (Sonn & Baker 2016) and embodying a material relation to the world (Barad 2003). Artforms as sites of engagement can enable the senses to breathe, and create spaces to build a dialogical relation between artists and audiences (Vella 2018). They have the potential to form links across cultural boundaries, and to enable sensory mapping or 'sense-making' (Powell 2016, 402).

Acknowledging these arguments for valuing the affective and embodied differences of arts practice, I have researched connections between visual, verbal and performative modes of practice, for an expansive definition of sensory literacy. Voices need to be heard and cultural differences encountered across all viable forms of communication, to enable equity and participation in a 'reading of the world' (Freire 1998, 23).

Mapping Practice

To explore the potential for empowerment through arts practice as it builds sensory literacy, I will introduce a theoretical framework through Freire and Foucault. I wanted to investigate whether comparative relation between theorists of empowerment would

enable students to make nuanced, interpretive responses in their practice. It could be said that my intentions were similar to those of teachers who inform the development of artworks with more than one related artist. My premise is that emancipatory theory can be accessible for the young, the socially disadvantaged, and for people who have historically been excluded from a voice in cultural participation. If we offer learning opportunities in art and design that create bridges between the known and the unknown, we can make further possibilities for inclusion and awareness of diversity in education.

Freire and Creative Routes to Literacy

A Freirian sense of emancipatory and empowering education brings particular characteristics to the fore. The term 'emancipation' relates to Freire's approach to liberation from forms of oppression, such as racism, gender inequality, and social and economic confinement or exclusion. We could define emancipation as a newfound freedom to think and take action; in the case of art education this can be freedom to think about art in its social context, to voice affective responses and interpretations in group discussion, or to make new work in connecting with materials and the environment.

Sensory arts practice can be an empowering experience in education, when it relates to the cultural experiences of each student. With a Freirian perspective empowerment is formed in creating terms for how we see our surroundings, 'to *name* the world to change it.' (1996, 69). Empowerment is brought about through a change in each student's conditional relation to society; this change requires a listening and responsive 'dialogical' (70) learning environment. In school-based practice research, space was created for class discussions in which students formed their own definitions of what 'power' means, and its positive and negative senses – making their own 'blueprint' for empowering practice (hooks 1994, 6)

'Power' is viewed in its negative sense by Freire as an oppressive and dehumanising force, yet the *empowerment* of sensory literacy forms expressive processes that recognise and supporting learning capacity. Freire focused on the systematised hierarchies that are set in place by dominant groups in society through the language of elites. He addressed the apparently insurmountable differences between educated property owning social groups, and the tenant landworkers who were tied into the hierarchies that both housed and confined them.

Finding that a 'culture of silence' (Freire 1998, 38) persisted among social groups who could not access the forms of verbal literacy that enable entry into higher education, Freire took action in the field, in mid to late 20th century Brazil. Without platforms for participation in the professional classes, the landworkers were spoken over and dehumanised (Freire 1996, 60). They appeared to accept the systems of governance, to 'adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor.' (27). Schiffer observes this tendency to accept the imbalance of power, with reference to Freire, in her research of power and representation in community based design (Schiffer 2020, 424).

However the landworkers also continued to pass their creative community traditions on to younger generations, and in these traditions Freire found the roots for rehumanisation and social participation. He taught adults to develop literacy through sensory expression, beginning with writing and speaking the words of their songs and poetry, to generate a sense of shared cultural ownership in learning (Campana 2011). Freire worked with this oppressed group so that they could raise their voices to shape 'the designs' and 'the anticipations of their new world' (Freire 1998, 38).

Freirian critical pedagogy is 'problem-posing', lateral and dialogical. It aims to replace the hierarchical or 'vertical patterns' of 'banking education', as a deposit of knowledge (Freire 2007, 117) and therefore supports inventive creativity in education.

Traditional methods of drilling and testing are seen as ways of pacifying students, through 'fact affirmations' (Freire 2007, 110).

A Freirian perspective also recognises that those who have access to systems of privilege, enabled through cultural inheritance, have existing platforms to build dialogue and connections, that can bring new expressive and creative voices into decolonised learning spaces. Freire believed that those with dominant cultural advantage, through class, ethnicity, gender or an able body, need to situate themselves with the oppressed: 'to learn with the people about the people's world' (1996, 161).

Since the first publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970, global information networks have produced a more interconnected 'mesh' of dialogue than could have been anticipated at that point (Blake & Stearns 2016, 80). However access to globalised communication is still unequal. In the recent developments of digital learning interfaces since Covid-19, there are notable differences in access to technology for different social groups (Mihelj et al. 2019). To extend a Freirian concept of sensory literacy in critical pedagogy, we could observe how dialogical practices in visual, performative and embodied self-expression can build confidence to access new information.

Freire's starting points for critical pedagogy have influenced successive theorists and educators, such as bel hooks – who has a pioneering intersectional feminist approach to 'liberatory' theory in *Teaching to Transgress* as it connects to Freire's 'practice of freedom' (1994, 6) and *Belonging* (2019), Joe Kincheloe who edited a *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (2008) and has informed my research through his work on teachers and students as researchers (1998, 2003) and Henry Giroux who protests for intellectual vitality in teaching (2010, 2021). Giroux's critical pedagogy links to Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (1998) to increase access to opportunities in education that help

secure a vocal place in society. He said in his keynote for the *iJADE Hybrid Spaces* conference, 'I am more concerned about access, I am concerned about bringing people from the community into higher education. I'm a working class kid.' Giroux said we need to contradict 'the dis-imagination machines' for empowering education and 'give students a voice in the classroom.' (Giroux 2021) Encouragement for oppressed groups as originators of culture is maintained in imaginative critical pedagogies in the arts (Campana 2011, Levy & Weber 2011, Vella 2018, Schiffer 2020).

One critical response to Freire is that the language he uses is complex and can be inaccessible to those it is trying to reach (Boronski & Hassan 2015, 62). I intend to demonstrate that expressive arts practice can help students access interpretations of Freire and other theoretical texts. In accessing affective, sensory forms of expression students sometimes make a creative leap, and invent new ways of communicating ideas. I will now discuss why we could also refer to Foucault to empower sensory literacy in art and design.

Who needs to know about Power/Knowledge?

Foucault deconstructed the ways in which systems of power and fields of knowledge interrelate (1980). Sixth-form students and artist educators do not usually have access to Foucault, who observed the systemic hierarchies of power/knowledge in institutions such as schools. Foucault was fascinated by the codified, bordered discourses that form the language of educational settings. One way that schools outline hierarchies of learning is through verbal literacy, and quality assessments of this that enable access into higher education.

Like Freire, Foucault challenged the shifting foundations of humanism as they are 'tied to value judgments' of different political and historical eras (Foucault 2007, 111). Foucauldian theory may be seen as enabling self-evaluation in learning and

teaching, in that it encourages an understanding of our 'points of insertion' (Foucault 1969, 118) in governing systems that can limit our capacity for self-expression (Wilkins 2016). For example, if students and teachers can take ownership of the language used to assess their progress and performance, they can begin to choose how to creatively respond to this language (Atkinson 2018). A relation to Foucault can offer critical tools that assist in mapping learning experiences, without limiting the spontaneous and affective experimental phases of practice. In this article I will discuss ways in which such critical tools can become more accessible. As with relation to the artworks of others, theoretical texts can act as springboards towards more reflective practice. Foucault said that we are always discovering and relating to our limits, 'we are always in the position of beginning again' and rethinking (2007, 115).

With a Foucauldian lens, all forms of cultural interaction may be considered as 'discourse', and this definition includes images, body language and digital communication as well as verbal text. Foucault notes that such forms of discourse are enacted differently in 'each culture', and that we need to study 'their modes of existence' (Foucault 1991, 117) – an observation that supports interdisciplinary arts practice research, and mixed or 'multi-modal' methods (Kara 2020). We may observe that although visual images do not present the immediate cultural boundaries of verbal language, they have different cultural significances that relate to ways of organising reality as the 'regime of truth' recognised within particular cultures (Foucault 1980, 131). Cerkez also notes how sensory patterns, in vision and hearing, are located in historical 'codes and contexts' that become 'dependable' (2014, 281).

Current global action to decolonise learning content aims to encourage schools and universities to include more diverse reference points, and to challenge dependency on a traditional western vision of culture, welcoming input from minority groups

(Nişancioğlu, Gebrial & Bhambra 2018). I will later discuss ways in which theory can be recontextualised through arts practice, to have relevance for local communities, and to students' experiences of cultural differences.

Foucault addressed the power dynamics involved in governing processes, as they emerge through managerial structures outside the power of individuals in education - such as the rituals for behaviour management and performance observations. Power is formed through interpersonal connection as a 'relationship' (Foucault 2007, 134): we are *affected* in this way by one another. This is a less known aspect of Foucauldian theory, that assists in understanding how knowledge is transmitted through the intricate networks of schools and universities.

The affective qualities of power relations, that emerge through the ways in which people behave with one another, are gestural and embodied. Methods of interaction include sensory relationships between different physical capacities that Foucault terms 'bio-power' (Jiminez & Valle-Vazquez 2015). These embodied and relational capillaries (Worthman & Troiano 2016) of power/knowledge connect with the intricate pastoral and subject related interaction between teachers and students. In my work with young people, I found that a relational approach to empowerment offered affective structures for learning development, as I will evidence in the data analysis.

The outline of this theoretical basis for the practice research in discussion here is intended to indicate transferrable points of connection. Some significant points of connection between Freire and Foucault are found in their relation to empowerment through a range of modes of discourse. Freire's work with songs and poetry, and their significance for vocal cultural belonging and politicised communities, connects with Foucault's account of how such creative discourses form alternative language and

historical 'counter-memories' (1977) that combat 'our current modes of truth and justice' (hooks 2019, 101) in sites of learning and culture.

Methodology

The empirical research that I will refer to as a case study for sensory literacy is drawn from a more extensive project on issues of freedom and autonomy, and applications for philosophy in art and design education (Matthews 2018a, b, c, 2019). I investigated approaches to student empowerment, questioning how theoretical texts might be made more accessible, and interesting for students, through arts practice (Mannay 2010, 96). The methods used also enabled more confident vocal interpretation of other cultural texts, such as artworks, politics, enactments of gender, creative literature and writing about artworks.

The research had a multi-modal arts methodology. Multi-modal research combines different modes of data collection. It can also refer to a comparative data analysis through different theoretical approaches, such as Foucauldian power/knowledge theory and Freirian critical pedagogy, as they are combined to offer an in-depth relation to the data (Kara 2020). The extensive research combined qualitative interviews, student discussion groups, content analysis of artworks, and discourse analysis of these 'different modalities of research' (Rose 2016, 50). There was a longitudinal and systematic approach to the data collection and analysis which took 4 years (Matthews 2018a). I work in teacher education now, and I find the need for more awareness of sensory literacy is a current concern in art and design education.

There were two specially designed practice research schemes of learning (Matthews 2019) 30 qualitative interviews with artist educators, artists, gallery educators, and students aged 16-19, and focus groups with students who had learning difficulties and could not communicate confidently in larger groups (Matthews 2019).

The projects for students were intended to activate emancipatory theory in arts practice; this approach relates to Emme's concern for criticality in learning environments as 'constructive activism' (2001, 64) and to Schiffer's research on reflective approaches to power relations in design education (2020, 419).

Research through teaching practice offered various forms of student voice to bring to the data. The student comments in this article are from the class discussions, transcribed from video recordings they made, and from their annotations on artworks. The themes were located by thematic discourse analysis – an approach often associated with Foucault. Rose says of Foucauldian discourse analysis, 'The diversity of forms through which a discourse can be articulated means that intertextuality is important to understanding discourse.' (Rose 2016, p. 187) There was a systematic inquiry, that involved detailed coding and concept mapping (Kara 2020). The thematic concept I have set out to map here is empowerment through sensory literacy. This was a carefully situated project with reflexive research ethics about workplace inquiry, that aimed to address the power imbalance of being a teacher-researcher (Kincheloe 2003) by increasing student voice and independent, unobserved making activity and creative interventions outside their sixth-form college in the local neighbourhood.

I designed a project for Level 3 vocational art and design students, taking a course that is seen as equivalent to A Level entry qualifications by some universities. Students were told that this was a research active project, and they gave consent for project material to be included on an anonymous basis. Students on the vocational course are usually considered to have less academic capacity than A Level students (Matthews 2019), so this seemed to be a great starting point for researching methods of empowerment.

A Project of Empowerment

When planning a project that could empower students, myself and a colleague 'Sam' - who collaborated in this practice research, differentiated our methods for structuring activities so that all students could build confidence in their capacity. The project was designed to begin with collaborative group work and move towards fluency and individuation. The students were in the second year of a Level 3 vocational art and design course. They had already chosen the specialist field, or 'pathway' that they wanted to study at university. The *Power Project* was introduced with this brief:

> Politics, gender politics, the design of prisons, power dressing, wealth and status, schools and education, the class system, the monarchy and imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, employment structures, social care 'Big Brother' and the surveillance state, race and equality, poverty and regeneration – all involve aspects of Power. In this project you are to develop a wide range of research into the themes of 'power'. This research should explore themes which relate to your chosen specialism. By using your research, and through experimentation, you are to produce a final outcome which develops a response to the theme appropriate to your specialist field.

This outline was intended to provide multiple reference points for versatile interpretation, locating the students as practice researchers (Kincheloe and Steinberg 2008) with an affective relation to issues raised. Such introductions to project work can encourage criticality in a 'problem-posing' (Freire 1996, 67) learning environment. A student who will be anonymised as 'Jan' commented on this provision for multiplicity in interpretation in annotations to his artwork:

> From my perspective this project is versatile, especially with the way it is connected to many spectrums, even the word 'power' itself. It coincides with different environments and their issues.

Jan communicates a sense of how the routes of interpretation are made visible, and how

silenced voices are made audible through visual and discursive interaction with the 'many spectrums' of theoretical and cultural texts. Here 'spectrums' as modes of colour and light are brought into the way the subject of power is illuminated for this student. Students were asked to read the project brief and construct 'best questions' to ask others in the group for more ownership of learning and for lively 'problem-posing' interaction from the beginning.

Collaborative Artwork: interpretation and contextualisation

The first part of the project began with collaborative group exercises, to expand a dialogical relation to the theme, and for a shared sense of participation in the analysis and transformation of cultural power networks. Students were introduced to artworks as sensory 'texts', referencing work made by artists Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger to demonstrate how artworks may challenge the dominant uses of written texts as cultural signifiers. These artists problem-pose social issues that are compounded in advertising and political propaganda, for example economic inequality and lack of body positivity.

We also talked about how the expressive forms of letters are altered in graphic design, to encourage different emotive responses (McMullen 2016). I then invited visual, discursive and performative reactions to quotes from Freire and Foucault. The texts brought into class discussions were selected for their accessibility, and for their relevance to the project; they became talking points for students' own relatable experiences. Students chose quotations to work with in pairs, for the language to be used within a peer engaged context. One quote from Freire offered a definition of negative power, as the denial of freedom in learning and working.

> Work that is not free ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit and becomes an effective
> means of dehumanisation.
> (Freire 1996, 126)

Students also looked at the Foucauldian definition of power as a relationship, through which one individual can influence another.

> Power is relations; power is not a thing, it is a relationship between two
> individuals, a relationship which is such that one can direct the behaviour of
> another or determine the behaviour of another.
> (Foucault 2007, 134-5)

They were also given a brief statement that outlines Foucault's rationale of power/knowledge as inseparable conditions, since knowledge can be viewed as a route to and an expression of power.

> Knowledge and power are integrated with one another and there is no point in
> dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power.
> (Foucault 1980, 52)

In a lively group discussion, students talked about how power/knowledge could be used for productive or negative effect. They named their terms for 1) 'positive', 2) 'negative' and 3) 'for good or bad' – i.e. with positive or negative intentions and outcomes. They outlined positive power as it relates to a sense of agency, action, community, communication and justice. Terms for power that could be for 'good or bad' included internal 'thoughts', affective forces such as 'love' and external observation. 'Surveillance' was also located in this middle group, rather than in the negative. Students saw systems for protecting them against criminal activity and safeguarding on the internet as important forms of social organization. The shifting ethics of external influences were also observed in systems of governance as 'leadership, democracy', in economic power as 'wealth', and in physical capacity as 'strength'. Negative power was seen as an attack on others in 'violence', 'bullying', 'tyranny' 'oppression' and prejudice as 'bias against people'.

After this initial 'naming of the world' of power, students were asked to respond to the statements from Freire and Foucault through two 'experimental photography' activities. In the first activity, projected images formed part of the photographic experimentation. The intention was to find a more active, creative and interpretive relation to text, by taking it into spatial projections. Students embodied their affective interpretations through performative responses (Fig. 1).

Foucault observed that, 'The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self.' (Foucault 1991, 83). The body carries traces of events and experiences, as the marks of existence, and these marks form texts that can be traced and expressed in language. Ideas both alter or 'dissolve' this embodied text of experience, or move beyond the affected surface of the body as a map of life's events. Through their enactment of extracts from Foucault's texts, I think that students were empowered to 'reinscribe events', and transform experience by writing with the body. Students were also able to raise some of the more oppressive inscriptions of society to the level of consciousness. These findings relate to Levy and Weber's explorations of 'body writing' (2011, 302) and 'metaphorical photography' (305) as methods for increasing self-expression in arts practice.

To set the scene for creative experimentation, we projected the quotations from Freire and Foucault in the courtyard of the Sixth Form College, displaying them across the walls of the building and shining them into classrooms. This activity was influenced by Jenny Holzer's text projections on public buildings. Holzer challenges the guarded power/knowledge of organised forms of governance. In one critical artwork she tells us that 'The beginning of the war will be secret' (1984). Holzer subverts the coercive messages of advertising, in statements such as 'Protect me from what I want' (1984). Art text as a visual stimulus for critical response to society continues to emerge in work

by Bob and Roberta Smith (2018), Jacob V. Joyce, Corita Kent, Mark Titchner and Juan Osborne among others.

In the dusk of winter at 4.30, students enacted forms of freedom, challenging negative experiences of power as physical confinement. They jumped joyfully, and embodied an expansion of possibility in their movements (Fig. 2). These actions were recorded in photography that they could then develop in editing programs, reprographics and mono-prints. Students enjoyed these many layered transformative processes. The exploration of familiar spaces through expressive movement as performative embodiment could take place even in the recent lockdown and social distancing conditions that we have experienced. Digital media enable further transitions and imaginative expressions for 'multiple sensory modalities' (Cerkez 2014, 274).

The group then talked about their feelings of being observed in a different expressive relation to their learning environment. They gathered understandings of how power relations in schools and colleges can be enacted through the construction of panoptic, transparent institutional architecture, as it can facilitate all-seeing disciplinary regulation, and a centralised system of observation for 'making architecture transparent to the administration of power' (Foucault 1991, 217). Empowerment in this instance materialised in the students' use of a camera to provide an immediate digital medium for owning a lens on the world, for framing sensory representation and inviting interpretation (Levy & Weber 2011).

For the second practical group activity, students chose words from the texts they had discussed in class, and printed each word on a sheet of paper. Students took ownership of their interpretations of the key words by contextualizing them in the local environment with a range of sensory, tactile and embodied relocations. They moved the words around, scrunched up the paper, and weaved the texts between bars of the college

fence, 'to name the world', and then to have a sense of changing this world in reflection. Words such as 'dehumanisation', 'freedom' and 'determination' were positioned in a direct relation with the students' immediate surroundings, in images that represented emotionally conscious sensory literacy (Fig. 3). I found that this investigative process empowered students to contribute more vocally to the generation and development of ideas.

Subtle and Strong Voices in Arts Practice

In the second part of the project some students ran with the concepts of empowerment, humanisation and freedom that had informed their group activities; others kept the discursive and interpretive factors to build strong conceptual work in their specialist area of art and design. Jay's annotations described the sequence of his creative processes – in relation to the cultural discourses of politics.

> I started sketching different polling booths, as I was sketching I realised people can be influenced by others on their votes. So I started sketching more spaces and installations that kept this sense of privacy, the idea of your vote being a secret. I then wanted this space to relate back to the government of my designs.

Here the experience of empowerment in arts practice is expressed through the 'privacy' of choosing one's vote. Jay and others responded to the Foucauldian idea of spatialised surveillance, in architectural and time-based 'four dimensional' artworks. Referring back to the initial experimental photography, Jay projected images of the Houses of Parliament on a constructed installation. He said that this prismatic, visual representation of power was to show the different viewpoints of politicians (Fig. 4).

An instance of artwork as practice research that enabled sensory literacy was presented in the work of Ana, who made a film in which she interviewed male and

female students about what they would feel about a role reversal in dress codes. This
statement introduced her film:

> Hi my name's Ana and I'm doing this video because I want to know people's
> points of view about clothing and its power. I'm interested in how men and women
> dress differently, and wonder how men and women would feel if men wore the
> hijab. I put together a questionnaire which I gave to my class mates, and the next
> day I videoed them telling me how they feel about those questions.

Making this film enabled a methodology of 'consultation' (Foucault 2007, 164) for
Ana's innovative practice research around cultural discourses of gender. Ana had
developed her own strategy for 'problem posing education' (Freire 1996, 67) with her
peers as 'co-investigators' in artwork as an interactive social practice (87).

For some the project provided an outlet for fears of the power they felt others
had over them, or for anxieties that were attached to particular experiences. Donna
expressed her anxiety as it attached to what she saw as the conditioning power of words.

> The power of words upon young people is immense, because people as human
> nature look towards words as knowledge to guide them. This leads to people being
> able to be guided by others who are power hungry.

Donna's exploration in art practice can be seen as being true to herself in: a 'free and
creative consciousness' (Freire 2007, 22) to 'say what has to be said' (Foucault 2005,
366). Donna, working in fashion design, responded to social conditioning through vivid
mark-making and outspoken statements printed on fabric.

Other students responded to social anxiety. Rafi specialised in architecture, and
focused his response on confinements of space in which he experienced claustrophobia
and vertigo, as in his digitally adjusted image of a spiral staircase (Fig. 5). The
affordances of space and time that this project created around issues of power, enabled
Rafi to express his awareness of factors that impacted his wellbeing in society – and his

hesitations in pursuing a career in architecture, as the first in his family to go to university. Rafi created a cardboard structure that could be photographed and edited into a range of architectural settings, such as a banking district of the city (Fig. 6). In creating this work Rafi intervened in social discourses of 'power through transparency' (Matthews 2019) using the haptic properties of freely available cardboard in relation to the distant glass towers in the banking district. This method of creating ownership through local assemblage, with a relation to the body, and digital resituation could be seen as a material gesture of affective practice research to contradict instructive 'banking education' (hooks 1994, 5).

Conclusion

The central argument of this article is for increased recognition of the ways in which all of the senses input to expressive voice and creative communication. I have drawn attention to the ways in which cultural belongings are formed in sensory expression through visual art, sound and embodied performance. A sensory literacy approach enabled the inclusion of theoretical and cultural texts that were considered beyond comprehension, in the constructions of vocational students' capacity and ability that permeate formal education systems. My findings identify the significance of understanding sensory literacy for increasing students belief in their own capacity. I have located transferrable methods for encouraging teachers in art and design education, who may also want to bring in more theorists for decolonisation – such as bell hooks' who has a 'liberatory politic' for artists of colour (hooks 2019, p.131), and took courage in her own approach from a critical relationship to Freire, saying his work had been 'living water' to her (1994, 50).

I have discussed methods of working with visual, discursive and embodied forms of self-expression, that are integrated with text-based artwork. I argue that this

integral approach to vocal empowerment in practice raises students' confidence to engage in learning, and can encourage their mobility across the persistent academic-vocational divide. I have theorised sensory literacy in relation to Freire and Foucault. In doing so I referred to Freire's creative methodologies for acclimatising disadvantaged groups to new cultural texts, and to more investigative social participation. In this case study, students' initial collaborative interpretations of the meaning of 'power' took place through discussion and relocation of quotations from Freire and Foucault in arts practice. Discussions of negative and positive power are now emerging in the anti-racism toolkits of major institutions such as The Wellcome Trust (2021).

In its initial collaborative stages, the *Power* project enabled modes of speech, image, gestural embodiment, spatial and contextual relocation. In the later stages of individuation, I observed that the group discussions and performative embodiments of the artists' and theoretical texts in focus, did not then produce a defining choice of idea or aesthetic. Findings included the empowering effect of the initial group discussions, that enabled students to construct their own arguments, and to take more inquiring approaches to their individuated developments in practice. A key point for future action is that methods for integrating sensory literacy need to be taken up at all levels of education, to empower diverse voices for cultural participation.

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