

“In the Beginning was the Picture, and the picture was in the text ...”

Presenting Picasso’s Guernica in Various Multi-Media Settings

Roger Moore
3M National Teaching Fellow

Author’s Contact Information

Roger Moore
Island View, NB, Canada
email: rgmoore@stu.ca

Abstract:

This essay is a reflection upon my development as a teacher throughout a lifetime of teaching in Canada (1966-2010). It starts with the transmissive, authoritarian model, moves through the interactive role, and arrives finally at the teacher not only as facilitator but as constructor of a do-it-yourself guide to self-sustainability in student learning. While my development as a teacher (evolution) seems to run parallel to the development of multi-media (revolution), there are, upon closer examination, other factors involved, as I will demonstrate.

Key Words:

Authoritarian, transmissive, interactive, facilitator, multi-media, self-sustainability in learning, teaching, life-long learning.

Introduction

When I worked as a Teaching Assistant, in graduate school in the University of Toronto in September, 1966, there was a small selection of Spanish Art in the text book and the Teaching Assistants were expected to spend a little time discussing selected paintings within the class. Picasso’s Guernica, an established icon of the Twentieth Century art world, was one of these paintings. In this brief essay, I will describe how presenting this particular painting to successive generations of students, from 1966 to 2010, changed as different forms of multi-media became more and more accessible to both teacher and student. At the same time as the presentation of the art work changed, my own approach to teaching was changing as well. This, too, will be outlined below.

I first presented Pablo Picasso’s Guernica to first year Canadian arts students in Beginning Spanish. I have continued with the presentation of Spanish paintings throughout my career, either in order to add some visual culture to the learning of Spanish or else as an integral part of an art and culture course. This story of my career as a presenter of art is a fascinating one, for in the beginning was the picture, and the

picture was in the text book, and students looked at the picture and I, the teacher, explained the picture in the book, as best I could, to the listening students. And that was how my career in multi-media started: a picture in a text-book explained by a teacher to a class of innocents. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate, the movement from the students as passive learners with the teacher as the source and transmitter of most, if not all, information (initial phase), through my role as an interactive communicator sharing knowledge and encouraging interaction with progressively more engaged students, to the teacher as a facilitator of the student's own search for knowledge, has, in many ways, run parallel to my use of multi-media.

The Teacher as Source of Knowledge

This narrative, as told in the opening paragraph, is also the story at the roots of my teaching career: an authority figure (the teacher as the source of most, if not all, knowledge) explaining an authoritative text (the picture) to a class of students sitting there, asking no questions, taking notes, and waiting for their heads to be filled with the same knowledge as that possessed by the teacher. This model, handed down to me by my undergraduate teachers, who did not want their own authority challenged and who most definitely discouraged questions during or after their traditional lectures, remained unchanged for a long time.

Picasso's *Guernica*, along with standard paintings by El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, Dalí, Juan Gris, and Miró, was ever-present in the early text-books. In the cultural moments that were associated with the beginning language course, I hesitate to call them genuine culture classes, I usually began with the traditionally accepted interpretation of the figures in *Guernica*: the bull, often associated with the theme of the minotaur, in the top left hand corner has bayonets for ears and a bullet for a tongue. Some critics, I would explain, say that it represents General Franco and his Fascist Allies. More, the bull has anthropomorphic qualities and it looks as if it is filled with self-importance and pride and perhaps a pinch of sadistic self-satisfaction as it stands threateningly beside the silent horrors of the fire-bombed country town of *Guernica* (Jaffé, 1970).

The teacher points with his index fingers at the broken statue of the slain soldier with the broken sword and the flower in his hand; then he points at the mother fleeing with her dead baby cradled in her arms; then there is the anguished horse, raising its nostrils and silently neighing, its neck stretched out and arched in obvious pain; then there is the house on fire with the man with raised arms and thrown back head; then there is the sun, shaped like a light bulb and illuminating the scene; and finally there is wisdom or knowledge, with a lamp in her hand, looking out of a window on the scene with pain and astonishment, bearing silent witness (Jaffé, 1970).

The idea of silence has now appeared, deliberately, on three occasions, for while the *lumière* / light is decidedly present in Picasso's painting, the son / sound is not. With the exception of the broken statue of the soldier and the dead baby, the open mouths express a tangible visual anguish from which sound is absent; more, the viewers of the painting are forced to recreate this sound from within their own imaginations. The painting's lack of sound, to repeat the paradox, is clearly visible, and strikes the viewer with an incredible force, the teacher tells the students, merely through the absence of

the sounds, which are expressed in the crackling flames and the ardently anguished body-language.

When I began lecturing on Picasso, the majority of the reproductions of *Guernica* were in black and white. As a result, as a teacher I was forced to make reference to the drabness of the original colours, which are so obviously absent from the black and white reproductions. I explained that although the photograph was a black and white one, there would be some touches of colour here, and here, and I would touch the photograph in the appropriate places with my index finger as I attempted to describe the greys and the blues of the original (Jaffé, 1970). The colours would be drab, if only you could see them, I would tell the class. And, of course, it was obligatory to mention that although the picture that I was explaining was, in most text books, only slightly larger than a postage stamp or a postcard, the figures are actually life size and the painting would be the size of the back wall of the classroom if the students could only close their eyes and imagine figures in that scale. The class used to sigh, whether in wonder or relief, I was never sure. I used to ask if there were any questions: but there rarely were. And that was the end of the art lesson. We would move on to the next topic, which I had chosen or, rather, which the authoritative text-book had set before me, the authoritative teacher, and there would be no more multi-media for a while.

The Interactive Teacher

Later in my career, when I became an established teacher, at a different university, I received some minor funding for travel, and during one of my irregular trips to Spain, a little while after General Franco's death (1975), I was able to visit the Casón de *Guernica*, where Picasso's *Guernica* was now stored along with some 100 preliminary sketches, drawings, colour trials, and paintings. In the Casón de *Guernica* I was able to purchase more slides of *Guernica* and the preliminary paintings as well as the exhibition catalogue (*Guernica*, 1981). This allowed me to develop enormously both my understanding and my presentation of Picasso's *Guernica*. First, there was a single slide of the entire painting. This could be projected, almost at full size, on the rear wall of the classroom. Then there were individual images of each figure, and these could be projected life size and explained one by one. Now the colours (blues, greys, black, sepias) were present, and one could talk about colour fade (in the slides), colour differences (in the various reproductions of the painting), and the authority of the one original painting, which, of course, everybody had to travel to Madrid to see.

In addition to the painting of *Guernica* itself, I now had a dozen or more slides of the preliminary sketches and paintings, and we could discuss the effects of Picasso's various experiments with colour upon the emotions of the students: was the pale green more effective than the blue? What effects did greys or purples achieve that black didn't? What shape should tears be: stars, small pears, circles, diamonds? What colours? We were able to look at, and discuss, the effects generated by the two studies of the Mother with a dead child II and IV / *Madre con niño muerto*, II and IV. This was true, too, of the various sketches and studies for the *Weeping Head* / *Cabeza llorando* (Martínez-Novillo, 1981).

Gradually, the class was becoming more inter-active. I was no longer lecturing and telling. The students were sharing the different feelings and emotions generated in them

by Picasso's paintings. These were individual to each student and students soon became more deeply involved in how the painter, Pablo Picasso, had seen various possibilities – shape, form, colour – and how and why he had chosen the shapes he did for the various paintings and preliminary sketches. The final version of *Guernica* could now be reconstructed as a set of demonstrable choices made from preliminary drawings and designs. More, the students themselves became involved in how those choices were made and this made both art and culture more personal.

Soon after the centenary of Picasso's birth (1881-1981), I was able to obtain a large slide set of Picasso paintings. Together with the slides came an audio tape that explained the paintings in great detail chronologically and in Spanish. Here was Picasso at age 6; here he was at 15 preparing his sketch for entry into art school; here he was with his first formal paintings. I was very surprised at the classical formation that shone so clearly through the early paintings. In these paintings, the reproduction and the representation of reality were so obviously pre-eminent. Then, there were the water colours, and these were followed by the first steps into the "isms": impressionism, pointillism, cubism -- analytical, geometrical, and synthetic (Jaffé, 1970). With Picasso's move from Spain to France, the Spanish art and culture section of the language course became an extended affair that filled, in the basic language classes, a full term.

In class, I would show a slide and play the tape for that slide however many times necessary for the students to catch the conversational speed Spanish and then explain the picture again or answer the many questions that flowed from the students. I scarcely realized it at the time, but by presenting Picasso, I was really presenting a history of modern European art (Rubin, 1980). But there was even more to it than that, for as questions arose, as they always did about the historical events that helped to generate the paintings, the culture class became a presentation of modern history with its references to the Spanish-American War and the Generation of 1898, the First World War and what José Ortega y Gasset (1925) has called the Dehumanization of Art; these great events were followed by the Spanish Civil War, and the Second World War with the Nazi occupation of France and the sombre, melancholy colourings that emerged in Picasso's art during the occupation period.

In addition, the conflict between photography (the almost flawless reproduction of reality) and art (the creation of new worlds, both inner and outer, with a new vision) came steadily to the forefront. Together with this came the difference between classical painting with its entry point into the picture and the studied and guided motion of the once-caught eye through the painting and the advent of modern art with its multiple entry points, multiple individual voyages, and its multiple – not single -- points of view. These different aspects of Picasso's paintings were hammered home in class by students who no longer saw what I, the source of all knowledge, saw and wanted them to see, and who were not afraid to stand up and say so. Sometimes, especially with Picasso's more abstract paintings, I would show a slide on the screen, hide the title, and ask what title the students would give to the painting. This always generated wonderful interaction and feedback. Another technique I used was to choose a set of colours and ask the students to tell me what emotions rose from those colours. At this stage, the interactivity was enormous and the slides of the paintings sparked interest and heated discussion in the classroom.

Some of the students chose to experiment with drawing and colouring. A favourite exercise, based on Picasso's so-called Blue Period, was to attempt, with a blue pencil only, to sketch and colour a simple household object, like a vase of flowers or a milk jug. The students found this alternately most frustrating and most satisfying as they succeeded or failed in their efforts. We sometimes held in-class wall exhibitions of these artistic efforts and students explained what they had been trying to do and how they had succeeded, or failed (Moore, 2008). What was becoming eminently clear was that the class had moved away from a history of art class with an authoritative teaching figure to an experimental class in which students went beyond looking and listening and receiving information, to experiment and experience for themselves, hands on, the essential acts of choice and creation.

The Teacher as Facilitator

Towards the end of my career, I moved the teaching of art from the beginning language course into the culture course and each year I dedicated a full month, twelve classes, to working with students on Picasso's place in the twentieth century art movements. As the worldwide web (www) developed, so more and more of Picasso's art became available online. I would begin the Picasso module with a brief and very traditional introduction to Picasso's art and then I would ask the students to go online and look for themselves at the pictures and histories available there. I would then ask them to choose the picture (or pictures or art movement) that they wished to research, and I would ask them to keep a journal based on their internet adventures and to include their chosen pictures, together with their reasons for their choices in a web portfolio which (a) would be presented to me as the teacher and (b) would be circulated to the class as a form of art library. Sometimes I let the students choose from a list of paintings, but, more often than not, I was content to let them explore online for themselves. Together with these online explorations came the necessity of distinguishing what online information was reliable and authentic and what was not. An additional surprise was that students now used the library, after they had been online, to check and confirm references and find alternate – and more permanent -- sources of information. This confirmed, for me, at least, that to allow the students to use online sources was to encourage them to explore a wider world and eventually to go beyond the web and back into the more traditional library system.

My task, in and out of class, became one of facilitation. I gave advice on which themes to choose, the pictures that might interest a specific individual, how to organize a research program, how to write a research essay, how to organize a web search, how to organize the portfolio itself, and how to confirm the reliability of the online resources that were being discovered on a daily basis. In class, I would use the internet to download into the classroom the paintings that students were researching, and individuals were invited to speak out about their interests and their involvement with specific works of art.

While this was less formal than a strict history of art, it was amazing how much ground was covered, not in a formal, chronological way, but in a rather disordered, chaotic fashion. Part of my task, as facilitator, became the ordering of this chaotic world (Moore, 2009). With the effort to put it into order, came the linking of themes, the

movement between artistic periods, and the differences between styles and artists. Much of this was visually self-evident and the students, accustomed to cartoons, videos, and TV, often grasped the visual essentials much more quickly than I did. In fact, I learned almost as much from them as they did from me. Certainly they broadened my education in ways that I could never have predicted.

For example, in the early eighties, I took the Picasso slides around certain provincial schools that showed interest in the Picasso lectures. In one fifth grade class, while I was pompously lecturing in my old authoritative fashion, very suitable as their classroom teacher assured me for grade five students, I was rather put off by the incessant laughter that greeted each of the paintings that I projected onto the screen. The paintings of figures with African mask-like faces, for example, were greeted with hoots of laughter, as was Picasso's Self-Portrait in early Cubist style. The Portrait of Ambroise Vollard was reconstructed from its Cubist de-construction much more rapidly than I could ever have done. One student rolled on the floor, he was laughing so much. When I asked him why he was laughing, his burred response was: "Look at his nose!" I did. And then I started to laugh as well. What a strange way, I thought, to discover the humour that is hidden throughout Picasso's art, lying there in wait, waiting to be discovered by the eyes of a child. It was then that I thought back to Picasso's own desire, expressed much later in his career, to be able to paint the world as a child sees it. Quite simply, to be taught this simple fact by a grade five student who could see further into Picasso's art than I could was a most humbling experience.

Conclusion

And now we have come full circle. As multi-media evolved from the picture in the book, to the slide show, to the son et lumière of a combination of tape and slide, to the downloaded web page, to the individual web search and portfolio construction, so my teaching evolved from authority figure (the fount of most transmitted knowledge), to the creator of interactivity, to the facilitator who enables the students first to discover on their own, and then to organize their studies in the fashion that suits them best.

While these two events – evolution (teaching) and revolution (multi-media) -- seem, in retrospect, to coincide, in actual fact, there were many other factors involved. My alternate voluntary career as a Level I and II Coach and Instructor (Rugby) in the National Coaching Certification Program, with its emphasis on Activity, Enjoyment, and Purpose, and the individual integration and development of all participants certainly played an enormous role in my development as a teacher, as did the hands on Certificate in Multi-Media Studies, which I took at the University of New Brunswick. A further factor was my involvement, in my own university, with Learning and Teaching Development and my attendance at the Teaching Showcase of the Atlantic Association of Universities. Then, from 2000 onwards, there was my involvement with the Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. This later career commitment to teaching allowed me, indeed encouraged me, to reflect continually and consciously both upon what I was trying to achieve – student participation, empowerment, and a methodology for Do-It-Yourself, Life-Long Learning –and how and why I was trying to achieve it.

As a result, at the end of my career, I can now see quite clearly the evolutionary periods that led me, as a teacher, through these phases – authoritarian / transmissive,

interactive, facilitative. In the last phase, I now realize that I elaborated a teaching style that empowered my students and allowed them a great deal of freedom to develop, still under my guidance, their own skills and interests in ways that were individual to them and that would therefore never be forgotten by them. All of this, for me, now comes under the rubric of student preparation for a life-long learning experience that is tailored to individuals and will hopefully last as long as their own curiosity.

References

- Jaffé, Hans. (1970). *Picasso*. London, New York, Sydney Toronto: Hamlyn.
- Martínez-Novillo, Álvaro. (1981). *Guernica – Legado Picasso*. Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura.
- Moore, Roger. (2008). yellow: from silence to creation. In Betsy Warland (Ed.), *Silences in Teaching and Learning* (pp. 157-60). Council of 3M Teaching Fellows / STLHE: Gauvin Press.
- Moore, Roger. (2009). Chaos Theory and the Teaching of *Don Quijote*. *Transformative Dialogues*, 2, 3. Retrieved from http://kwantlen.ca/TD/TD.2.3/TD.2.3_Moore_Chaois_Theoy.pdf
- Ortega y Gasset, José. (1925). *La deshumanización del arte*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente.
- Rubin, William. (1980). *Pablo Picasso. A Retrospective*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Warncke, Carsten-Peter. (1997). *Picasso*. Cologne: Taschen.