

**DIRECTED STUDY II STUDENT REPORT - SUMMARY OF WORK CONDUCTED**

<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b> AFTER COMPLETION OF THE DIRECTED STUDY(DS), STUDENTS MUST SUBMIT A REPORT TO THEIR DS MENTOR FOR GRADING (PASS/FAIL) CONCING THE DS COURSE LEAD AND GRADUATE STUDIES OFFICE BY <b>WEEK 14</b> OF THE SEMESTER			
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Please indicate one of the Directed Study options below			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>RA work</b>	<b>in LAB / PROJECT (please identify):</b>	<b>MENTOR:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>TA work</b>	<b>for COURSE (please identify):</b>	<b>MENTOR:</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Individual Project</b>	<b>PROJECT (please identify):</b>	<b>MENTOR: Laura Kozak</b>

Please fill in the appropriate fields		
<b>DIRECTED STUDIES I</b> (Spring, Year 1)	<b>GSMD550</b>	X
<b>DIRECTED STUDIES II</b> (Summer or Fall, Year 2)	<b>GSMD650</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>DS COURSE LEAD (Faculty member)</b>	Laura Kozak	

<b>Keywords</b>
Embodiment    Animation storyboards Oral storytelling    Theatre exercises    Indigenous
<b>Abstract/Summary</b>
I organized and facilitated an afternoon workshop titled Embodied Storytelling for ECUAD animation students. My aim was to discover whether participants could infuse their worldview in their storyboards through physical movement and introspection, as well as whether participants had residual feelings from the workshop. My hope was to demonstrate whether embodied story telling practices help visual story makers gain insight in how they chose to share their stories, confidence in exploring new ways to experience their stories, and lose their sense of self to get deeper in their story environment. The workshop was detailed but rewarding, with students participating in a range of playful movement: improv, mindfulness, dance, mask work, and puppetry. The overall response was positive and demonstrated the success of embodied storytelling as an additional tool for story making. This practice offers possibilities of further developing this workshop for the summer of 2023.

## Project Milestones

Workshop: April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## Process Overview

My initial interest was to look at techniques to help animators improve their storytelling techniques. Through continued conversations with Martin Rose, Connie Watts, Darren Brereton, Sean Arden, and Laura Kozak, I included a Cree story, games I learned through my 5-week improvisation course with Blind Tiger Vancouver, mindfulness exercises, puppetry exercises, and paper masks. The dance and movement activities were tested earlier in the semester during my Vulnerability and movement workshop (Dance dance, Vegetation!).

It took time before finalizing the design of the workshop. I did not initially plan to have so much movement involved in the process.

A detailed description of the workshop, as well as the research behind making it, are attached to this report. Below is a concise recount of the workshop itself.

The workshop:

Over the period of four hours, six to five second-year animation students from ECUAD volunteered to participate in my Embodied Storytelling workshop. The workshop was held April 6<sup>th</sup> 2023 in ECUAD's motion capture studio. The room is large and had black curtains, a marge floor mat, chairs and lighting.

- (1) Animators were introduced to each other by sharing their pronouns, names, access needs, and need to knows (how they're feeling, if they're physically okay). I discussed how I will be recording the activities in the second half of the workshop and gave them the choice to decline being part of my video and audio recordings.
- (2) Warm up: Students played 1 ½ hours of improv games (eight in total) to help prepare them for the forthcoming experiential activities. These games to help them get out of their heads and into their bodies, get to know each other, to accept failing (joyfully), and act intuitively, rather than overthink their decisions. This went by more quickly since we were few.
- (3) A twenty-minute lunch break was offered. Food provided.
- (4) After the break, students were laying on the floor to experience a **grounding mindfulness exercise**. This was to see whether a relaxed and open mind help them process the story. I ask to bring attention to their breath, the sensations in their body, hands against their body, body against the floor. I heard through yawning that some relaxed their parasympathetic nervous system. I referenced somatic psychology for this part.
- (5) While still on the ground, I shared the Cree story of the moose and the Trickster **orally**.
- (6) They then shared visions of their story after slowly waking from their restful state. Examples of things shared: folk story character of a man who comes and gets children, avatar characters, jesters, tall, lush trees, dormant trees, rabbits, stars, foxes. I referenced those visions the first exercise: **movement and dance**. That lasted for approximately five minutes.
- (7) The next activity was **mask work**. There were paper masks of a fox, a rabbit, a moose, and a trickster figure. As a group, students would express how some of their characters would move and feel in given situations.
- (8) The next activity was **puppetry**. Participants familiarized themselves with the three key mechanics of puppetry: breath, focus and weight. They demonstrated movement of the puppet in a story they're familiar

with, and a part of the story I shared. The puppet was meant to be the trickster.

(9) Students were then led to a table to draw their storyboards. I retold the story, then gave them seven minutes to draw their storyboard.

(10) I closed off the workshop with a few things: a recapitulation of our work, a check-in and reminder of recorded documents, the questionnaire, and to make a noise that expresses how they feel.

The workshop ended on time. Some participants came because friends invited them. We began with six participants, but one had to leave for a meeting at the end of the warmup. Each step had a recapitulation of the previous activity, the current one and the next activity. Music and lighting was heavily used to help participants.

### Sticking Points

Some key points of note:

- Students were excited about the workshop and appreciated it.
- The interesting, individual elements that people brought from their culture or pop culture was what made their stories unique.
- There were a few speeds of processing: through the body with the activities, and a quieter processing of the story in their minds.
- Students were less comfortable doing movement and mask work exercises but tried regardless.
- The environment played a major role in setting the ambiance for play.
- Music was a great way to get people out of their heads.
- Both helped to bring people out of their shell when either I or a participant really got into the exercise.
- Adapting the workshop to people's needs was important.
- Participants tended to use both their experience of the story to old storyboarding habits.
- Participants all knew each other. It might have been different if they were more like strangers.
- I should cue participants to get ready to visualize a story before sharing it.
- Nothing ran long: everyone had stamina to play the warm-up games, and I shortened two of the activities due to participant.
- I felt more unsure about the movement and mask work activities, particularly because I haven't done them before.
- I was sensitive to people's hesitation. I am not entirely comfortable leading workshops that have very theatrical roots, because I don't come from a theatrical background per se.
- I've been undervaluing the worth of this workshop by thinking of it as childish and unfounded, and judging its value based on my peers' interest.
- The process was less enjoyable to make because I did not surround myself with peers who expressed interest in my work.
- The ratio of time that it took to use the masks versus making it was way off. I wish I had found an easier/simpler version of my idea.
- A low-fidelity version of the workshop could have been explored.
- I overlooked the effects of how interaction with other participants could influence their capacity to tell stories.

### Key Insights

- Curating an environment for playful exploration is as important of a factor to consider as the activities themselves.
- To make the storyboarding process more intuitive, will better encourage participants to stick with their unique envisioning of the story through the activities and in their storyboards, and encourage loose, broad depictions of their stories.
- It's important to be aware of and have empathy when leading participants.
- Another low-fidelity version of the workshop could be explored before trying it again.
- There was a symbiotic relationship between the somatic processing of their experience and the introspection of bot the physical and mental processing of their activities. This demonstrates that embodiment storytelling activities require a full body processing, and that may require longer periods of rest or intero- and introspection.
- There is much insight to be gained on silence. Allowing people to process, speak and work in silence were important in this high-energy workshop.
- I need to be proactive to seek help early on, in order to better plan and recruit participants.
- Given my hesitations, I will have to find more research around embodiment and theatre exercises. These aren't necessarily taught together, strangely enough.
- I would like to explore spatial design/narrative structure using the "playground metaphor." This means creating an environment that invites the idea of playful behaviour, but in structure in a way that players can participate or abstain themselves, fully engage with other players, and step our and in without much impediment, all while remaining in a playful space.

#### Technical Appendices

#### References

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**FOR FACULTY USE ONLY – STUDENTS DO NOT COMPLETE  
DIRECTED STUDY EVALUATION (50 - 150 words by DS MENTOR)**

Julie – there is a patience, curiosity and richness with which you approached your Directed Study this semester. I appreciate the time you put into gathering information and carefully considering the ways you wanted to work with story and storyboarding. As a designer and student, I anticipate you will need to continually advocate for the time you need to do the work you want to do, and I think it is important and worthwhile for you to take your time, even if the systems around you are telling you otherwise. Sometimes people mix up working at a different pace with not doing the work, and I want to tell you that I've absolutely noticed you working in a deep and rigorous way, and also contributing generously to the learning of your peers.

There are lots of good insights from your workshop in your reflections; things you can stay with even as (if) your practice shifts more towards spatial design. (For example, you write about the contrast between moments of silence and higher energy interactions – how can that translate into the way we perceive space?)

Yoko Akama has done some work I think you'd really appreciate linking language, spatial design and approaches to participatory work from within her Japanese worldview - for example, the concept of *mah* or 'space between' as a kind of important silence, or awareness of what is not there.  
<https://youtu.be/mHyQqftz9c8?t=46>

I think you said you have it already, but if not, I also suggest including *Research Is Ceremony* (Shawn Wilson, Fernwood, 2008) as a good example of bringing different expressions of relationality into research.

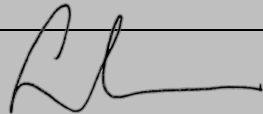
**GRADE**

**Mentor's please note: your feedback/evaluation needs to be submitted to the GSDM650 DS Faculty Course Lead (Associate Dean, MDes Program)**

X Pass

Fail

DS Mentor  
Laura Kozak



Date  
April 15, 2023