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The Monograph: Creative Thought/Creative Practice – A Case Study

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Abstract:

The Monograph recognises the primacy of practice as the decisive motivation for student practitioners. Our students are ‘practical theorists’, for they reflexively theorise through and from the practical experience of making work. Typically, this process results in diverse outcomes embodied as objects, artefacts, images, writing and speech. The Monograph’s integration of theory with the studio experience strengthens the relevance and the meanings students are able to grasp and articulate. By broadening the definition of what theory can be for practitioners, and allowing the dynamic nature of studio practice to drive theoretical interests, the Monograph is increasing students’ confidence and capacity to theorise.

Please note that the presentation by Rebecca Matthews (the case study) is available to download from the Teaching and Learning Institute website.

Keywords: monograph, assessment, dissertation, studio practice, community of practice

“Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice.” (Wenger 2010)

For several years the Monograph has replaced the dissertation as the major critical assignment undertaken by final-year Textile Crafts’ students. The substantial difference between the Monograph and a dissertation is that the Monograph recognises the primacy of practice as the defining motivation for student practitioners; and that theoretical involvement begins in understanding the nature of that practice as key in identification of critical sources and emerging themes relevant to a student’s particular way of working.

Synthesising practice and theory

Writing about their own practice opens students to a range of challenges as they negotiate the more familiar forms of critical writing with methods such as phenomenological description and interview formats that better permit discourse and reflection on ideas developing in the studio. Our students are ‘practical theorists’, for they reflexively theorise through and from the practical experience of making work.

Outcomes are rigorous in terms of academic standards but it is the dynamic nature of studio practice which drives the theoretical interests of students. The ability to understand and situate their work becomes evident in the 5000-word submission made at the conclusion of term 1; but it is in the presentation the Monograph also requires at culmination of the degree, that the impact of this way of synthesising practice and theory becomes clear.

Typically, this process results in diverse outcomes embodied as objects, artefacts, images, writing and speech. Therefore, a student’s theoretical engagement is particular to their way of thinking, envisioning and making work. The Monograph reinforces that individuality. However, the overall diversity of students’ intentions, academic skills and studio outcomes requires diversity in the critical forms by which they can articulate their understanding. The Monograph is responsive to this diversity. This has led Monographs to include a range of

research methods and written forms such as phenomenological description, experimental narrative, and discourse analysis of formal and informal audio interviews.

The Monograph’s integration of theory with the studio experience strengthens the relevance and the meanings students are able to grasp and articulate.

By broadening the definition of what theory can be for practitioners, and allowing the dynamic nature of studio practice to drive theoretical interests, the Monograph is increasing students’ confidence and capacity to theorise.

Monograph: Final Year/Level 3 (30 credit module)

Term 1	Term 2	
Studio and Professional Projects	Major Studio Project	Exhibition
Monograph Part 1 50% (5,000 words)		Monograph Part 2 (50%) Presentation

Literature:

Etienne Wenger in *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.