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ABSTRACT

An internal faith integration project grant at a private, Christian evangelical Southern California University was awarded to one library faculty member in the university library. This grant funded a faith-based art and writing project in the library based on the theme of being a difference maker, a part of the university's mission for undergraduate and graduate students over the course of one traditional academic year. The grant funded supplies towards the project and scholarships to participating students. The project was led in the library to: enhance student engagement, integrate faith and art, and provide a shared experience with students. Inquiry-based and self-directed learning methods were employed with a learner-centered approach. Students participated in group and individual faith-based art activities. The purpose of the project was for students to grasp tangible faith topics and engage in activities that merged faith with art. The result of the activities was the creation of two major art pieces on display in one of the university libraries. The result of the project was confirmation of the library as a staple for student engagement and giving merit to faith as an element in creativity, providing a connection for spiritual growth.

Introduction

An internal faith integration grant at a private, Christian evangelical Southern California University was awarded to one library faculty member in the university library, who formed the idea and facilitated the grant project. The grant incorporated a faith-based art and writing project in the library directed towards undergraduate and graduate students. The title and theme of the project was called "*Difference Makers"* reflecting the mission of the university to devote a life of service to others. The project invited students to reinforce their faith through creative outlets.

Although the project was inclusive of students from all majors, the project primarily attracted art students. Scholarships funded through the grant were awarded to each participating student in varying amounts. Awards were based on participation rather than artistic ability. The purpose of this grant-funded project was to embody the elements of the university mission, to integrate faith in a practice-based form, allow students to grasp tangible faith topics, and engage in activities that resulted in recognition, reflection, and enhancement of one's understanding of the role of faith and art.

Literature Review

To provide greater depth to the project's purpose and goals, a literature review was completed on topics linked to the project: character formation; art and faith integration; storytelling as learning and spiritual growth; and libraries, student engagement, art, and faith. The following section will define each of these terms and provide a brief review of the current literature discsussing them.

Character Formation

Character Formation focuses on the student's personal expression of faith as they enter college, how their ethics and morals are formed at a Christian university, and the link of art and creativity to their moral identity, strengthening the students' abilities to express faith and helping to shape their character.

Character formation is a building block in developing sound moral judgement and good decision making. As a Christian, building character becomes part of one's spiritual growth. Much of what one learns in building character starts in childhood and is independently applied in adulthood.

The college student brings with them preconceived ideas and influence based on their upbringing. Upon entering college, students are introduced to an environment that establishes new social expectations with exposure to ideas that may contradict previous connotations of expressions of faith, initiating a world of self-discovery and new understanding of personal and relational faith (Powell, et al., 2012). This time also gives opportunity to Christian universities to present extracurricular activities that inspire personal and spiritual growth, helping to form or reinforce the student's definition of corporate and personal faith, which then helps shape character and understanding of expression of faith.

Although ethics and morals are not what makes a person a Christian, these are aspects that are associated with building character and strengthening faith. For instance, in the parable of the *Wise and Foolish Builders* in the gospel of Luke, one house is built on a solid foundation, representing wisdom while the other house is built on sand, representing foolishness. As illustrated, when one does not put Godly wisdom into practice, one does not develop their character and becomes a fool (Luke 6:46-49, NIV).

In college, the environment gives freedom for independence, but also exposes the student to their first adult responsibility of character formation. The Christian university places itself in a position that helps students develop character through ethics and morals, and faith integration, a distinction from secular colleges that often lack commitment to promoting ethics and morals in the individual, focusing more on education and worldly success (Hudson & Díaz Pearson, 2018). For instance,

secular institutions often state inclusivity, creativity, and innovation as their mission; whereas Christian university missions are often dominated by character formation or a life of service based on faith aspects. The difference may not be in what degrees are offered or in the value of education, but rather in how the education is applied, emphasizing the relationship of faith with knowledge and a life of service (Shek & Yu, 2015).

Analyzing one's faith as part of the learning process in Christian higher education is most often driven by, "…established principles or values drawn from religion, personal values, laws, or social norms," (Hudson & Díaz Pearson, 2018, p. 196). Although a person's character strengths will vary, character formation can still be, "…learned and acquired through practice," (Shek & Yu, 2015, p. 301). For college students, this drive also gives them a personal identity, often emphasized with personal strengths. Therefore, utilizing a strengths-based education places the Christian university in a position that encourages moral action and identification and application of character strengths by individual capabilities (Hudson & Díaz Pearson, 2018; Shek & Yu, 2015).

Beyond normative terms of character formation and strengths are subject-specific perspectives. One can have a general understanding of personal strengths, but one should also understand it from their subject's perspective. In art, for example, college students link their creativity with their identity. When creativity is a strength, the artist has the capability to tell a story and distort reality. However, the dilemma with this process lies with moral engagement. For instance, if one does not have a high moral compass, the altering of reality can lead to acceptance of moral disengagement or acceptance of the unethical (Keem, et al., 2018). Creativity itself does not cause the unethical. Rather, if the individual has a high moral identity, this characteristic would counter the unethical argument by strengthening the artist's ability to profess faith and claim moral values as part of their identity, thereby cultivating their strengths and motivating action (Hudson & Díaz Pearson, 2018; Keem, et al., 2018; Shek & Yu, 2015). Therefore, character formation is a vital aspect for all college students, but perspectives vary by subject. As such, the approach in developing character formation must also vary according to subject, but nonetheless is of high priority to the Christian university.

Art and Faith Integration

Art and Faith Integration gives background to the history of art used as an instructional tool and follows the eventual progression of exclusion or destruction of art in some churches during specific eras due to the perception and link of creations as forms of idolatry. This long running history of art provides context for the challenges art students face today, connecting the negative connotations of art history to the present, acknowledging the tendency for art to be controversial, and often discouraging the creation of religious themes due to the secular era. However, the literature also

suggests these challenges can be a method to equip students to defend art, to use art as a learning tool, and with newfound freedom to have the ability to connect faith with their art.

Creativity mirrors God in that it reflects the capacity to create something from nothing. According to Goetz (1982), "Human beings, for their part, are capable of bringing into being, from the world that God has given us, new things that did not exist before," (p. 369). The ability to create comes from God, therefore when one creates, one exhibits faith by using one's gifts and honing their skill, thus bringing honor to their creator through created works. Faith integration and creativity complement one another as they utilize both ability and creativity to express faith visually and intrinsically. Although religious and Christian environments have a long history of religious art, certain denominations have also influenced present approaches and perspectives.

Religious art throughout history was aesthetically pleasing and primarily served as instruction to patrons, particularly in the second through fourth centuries of the Roman church. But as history progressed, perception of art became comparable to idolatry, leading either to its destruction or prohibition. For example, the prohibition against art in ancient Israel, the Byzantine Iconoclasm era, or the restriction of art after the Protestant Reformation (Goetz, 1982). The false perception of the intent of art carried through to churches, in which they either eliminated or limited art. In turn, art was not allowed to flourish or allowed the devaluing of it in the church; logically carrying over to individual perceptions, thereby discouraging artists from using their talents.

Within the context of art's historical challenges with the church and the Christian perspective, transference created similar challenges for art students in the university. When one enters the secular art profession, negative connotations of religious art often inhibit the Christian artist. For example, students in art degree programs may be, "discouraged from including Christian imagery in their work by faculty members…," (Grant, 2017, p. 24) because they perceive that the content will make people uncomfortable, especially in secular institutions where art that is anti-Christian or anti-religious persists (Grant, 2017). In addition to faculty discouragement, the Christian art student has been known to be provoked by other students under the same premise or, at minimum, has received cynicism for creating Christian art. The negative atmosphere persists into the profession where, for instance, art galleries seldom display Christian or religious art and one seldom sees current artworks of spiritual or religious themes. Although those leading the direction of art may argue they desire to be sensitive to diverse audiences, in reality, there is a lack of inclusivity to those of faith, with galleries having greater inclination and acceptance of displaying art that is questionable or so incredibly graphic that parents, for example want to, "…cover their young children's eyes," (Grant, 2017, p. 25). Because of this, the Christian artist is in a position in which

their art is scrutinized, mocked, or made invisible. However, one of the few ways the Christian artist can prepare to be equipped with abilities to combat this challenge is by attending a Christian university (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006).

Equipping students with skills to combat scrutiny of their spiritual work can come from the very place where scrutiny is introduced; for example, the secular or non-religious based university versus the Christian university. Kuh & Gonyea (2006) found that when students enter university they are often liberated in their perception of faith. When one enters college, one is outside the realms of their sheltered existence and are introduced to new forms of spiritual activity (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). Consequently, the exposure and newfound freedom allows the student to be less rigid in what they deem acceptable as a form of worship. According to Kuh & Gonyea (2006), students increase their participation in spiritual activities when they enter college. Coupling this newfound liberation with the environment of the Christian university provides opportunities for students to engage in subjects such as art as a form of spiritual growth.

Intelligible value is traditionally placed on subjects that inform through reason and philosophy. Unfortunately, reason is dominantly represented in the sciences, which counters the value of art (Baccarini, 2018). Additionally, art is often associated with beauty or aesthetics, and often not considered utilitarian, or practical in shaping the moral framework. For instance, art is defined as one having good taste, thus increasing its association with social status (Winston, 2006). In reality, the definition does not tell anything about art's nature. But by association, status or class creates a setting where there is a justification, rather than acceptance of art's value (Winston, 2006). Arts' connection to beauty also connotates the message of beauty, that is to be female, gentle, or pleasurable; or to be evil in the overwhelming influence of beauty (Winston, 2006). However, the portrayal of a message in art, according to Baccarini (2018), is through illustration, thereby provoking an experience. This experience then leads to experiential knowledge, complementing philosophical reasoning, which deepens understanding of propositional knowledge (Baccarini, 2018).

The awareness of the learning process of creating art helps combat preconceived notions of art lacking philosophy or reason. Art is a source of learning that allows engagement consciously and sub-consciously through experience or reaction as well as technique, but it does not do it alone. Art is created through other sources of knowledge, seeking to change people's perception (Baccarini, 2018). Of beauty, art can be transformational rather than transcendental, re-engaging and re-introducing, "…as a means to expand and heighten our consciousness," (Winston, 2006, p. 299). For example, a piece on equality may seek to change perception and challenges one's morals and values, connecting ideas and goodness, and providing a conceptual basis that is morally edifying; furthermore, it re-engages the artist in moral pursuits on their own volition, improving their and others' perception (Winston, 2006).

Art as a learning source is significant because in order for artists to create they seek knowledge, use technique, and create content that illustrates this knowledge. Although viewing artworks and their perceptions vary from person to person, it does not stop the person from learning and being challenged with morals and comprehension (Baccarini, 2018). In connecting this perception with the Christian university, artists place themselves in an opportune position to combat negative perceptions, acknowledging that artists are in a unique position to visually honor God and change people's perception. This position presents positive challenges for faculty to connect faith and learning, equipping students with religious concepts using practical teaching tools to, "…bolster and reinforce the importance of faith in students' daily lives," (Bower, 2010, p. 18). In addition, recognizing that a Christian perspective is a primary reason students enroll in a Christian university, faculty need to use faith as a conduit, connecting, "…human needs and the values and beliefs that people hold to be important to intellectual life as well," (Bower, 2010, p. 17). Connecting faith and art would be tangible and practical, providing encouragement to students to be creative, adding value to art, and exposing the public to art that sends a message of faith.

The primary mode in learning and experiencing art in a university is in the classroom. To create art is to expand beyond the classroom and become knowledgeable because an artist that is knowledgeable represents art accurately and with greater depth. To become knowledgeable means going to the resource that provides it. Libraries present the opportunity to be a learning resource outside the classroom, thus an opportunity to engage with art students. As the source of learning, libraries provide access to art references, imagery, and information for developing techniques, and access to stories, of which is projected one way or another in all art forms.

Storytelling as Learning and Spiritual Growth

Storytelling is a creative outlet that has been used for thousands of years to engage with audiences, to relate to one another, and learn. Stories seek to project understanding and provide meaning to listeners (McDrury & Alterio, 2001). Stories provide an avenue to help make sense of life and know how to respond because they allow people to relate to their own experiences. As humans, we are story-based. Our brain inclines to stories because stories provoke interest, self-identification, and bridges a connection from the abstract or conceptual to the relatable. Stories allow us to relate to our own memory, providing a pathway for, "…information to be useful…" (Stahl, 2010, pp. 162-163). The power of the story facilitates learning in that it is experiential to the listener.

A story that is told well, "…can have a lasting impact and can be recalled and reprocessed long after the storytelling event," (Stahl, 2010, p. 169). This component is a vital aspect because a good story not only captures one's interest, but allows one

to identify with it, permitting formation of ideas, dreams, and goals (McNett, 2016; Stahl, 2010). Storytelling engages one's brain on a level that surpasses other methods including abstract thinking or memorization; it is a method used to teach and learn (McNett, 2016).

he brain is engaged in storytelling because it naturally and unconsciously plays out scenarios. As such, when a story is told, it provides a pathway for the brain to be stimulated. From the teacher or storyteller's perspective, this pathway is opened for students to learn at a greater capacity. For example, when narrative instruction is applied, students engage emotionally and interpret the narrative to their own life (McNett, 2016). Additionally, when a teacher uses narrative instruction, students are also being taught how to tell a story (Stahl, 2010).

From the storyteller's perspective, the purpose of a story is to provide meaning through context, providing an opportunity to gain insight and have a reflective experience (McDrury & Alterio, 2001). A story should be a learning tool that has a lasting impact on the individual and the community (McNett, 2016; Stahl, 2010). For example, a learning community of college students can write stories that invites discussion and reflection with others. When a story is written, it reflects the storyteller's view, making a relational, emotional, and personal connection with the storyteller and reader (McNett, 2016).

The elements are what make a story. A story is, "…the most powerful way to learn anything, or remember it because they rub with the deepest grain of our nature," (Saunders, 2018, p. 59). Our nature, coming from God, helps make sense of the world. There is no greater way to make sense of the world than through scripture, in which stories have been used to provide purpose and moral formation (Saunders, 2018).

Stories provide an avenue for spiritual growth because they come from God and Christians can offer access to scripture. Were it not for stories in scripture being passed on, identity of faith through God's people would have been altered or faded. As a facilitator, the teacher provides tools to learn the story, but as a storyteller, it is vital to project stories of faith, which then provides access to truth and spiritual growth (Saunders, 2018).

When you tell a story, you are creating with and from God (Saunders, 2018). As a Christian, your identity comes from God and the Bible. When you reflect on and retell biblical stories or create stories from a faith perspective, this strengthens your identification with other Christians and God. Faith storytelling is a gift that Christians share, providing access to scripture to communities that have little or no access. It also enriches the Christian community by offering a mode of reflection and identity with the creator (Stahl, 2010).

Access to stories strengthens the college student's ability to interpret and identify their spiritual journey and strengthen their storytelling skill. Access to stories and the resources that help guide the student is not prohibited to the classroom. Rather, students should regularly engage with the library as a learning resource to gain access to knowledge which then would be analysed and researched to create identifiable stories.

Storytelling as Learning and Spiritual Growth provides relevance to the power of storytelling as a learning tool and as a method for spiritual growth. Storytelling has been used as a learning tool for generations because of its compelling nature and humanity's learning aptitude for story-based methods. Whether learning a new technique, or looking to strengthen your faith, stories are created in the mind to make it applicable. The mind creates stories because that is how humans relate and remember. The literature provides a foundation for the use of storytelling while narrative instruction is used to help provide students with an identity. For spiritual growth, the literature points to biblical stories and how these provide Christians with an identity and relation to God. The literature also points out that Christians have the advantage to share biblical stories and write from a biblical perspective, enabling others to spiritually grow. Storytelling is one of the most powerful tools that can influence others. As such and when it is facilitated, it allows people to establish an identity, reflect, and grow.

Libraries, Student Engagement, Art and Faith

The final section, *Libraries, Student Engagement, Art and Faith,* gives background to the library's view on student engagement, including its limitations in accessing students, particularly art students. But the review also addresses how proactive libraries are aware of the value in student engagement, and the opportunities libraries have in offering programs that are thought-provoking, influential, and memorable. Taking a learner-centered approach makes it possible to engage with art students purposefully and experientially, embracing a culture that cultivates the student's imagination, and enables them to engage creatively. Finally, the review of literature addresses how the blending of art with faith cultivates and embraces faith integration unapologetically.

The primary role of a traditional library faculty member engages with students by teaching information literacy sessions and library science courses, and meeting one-on-one or in smaller groups, providing reference and research assistance. Primary student engagement occurs outside the classroom in a less formal setting, fostering a learner-centered approach, in which the librarian, "…supports self-directed learning, and facilitates the creation of new knowledge," (May & Swabey, 2015, p. 772). Recognizing the primary reason students visit the library is to complete academic work is a critical component of librarians for student engagement. The library also

views student engagement as a critical component to developing successful scholarly outcomes (May & Swabey, 2015; Schlak, 2018).

Proactive libraries view student engagement as a component of the library's value, making student learning styles a factor when designing spaces (May & Swabey, 2015; Schlak, 2018), their environment, and resources. These views also fall in line with the library's oath towards academic freedom and response to the diverse needs of the user (American Library Association [ALA], 2007; Reference and User Services Association [RUSA], 2008). Furthermore, libraries, "…foster opportunities for students not just to connect to resources but also to become an influential part of the university's research and creative communities," (Miller, 2014, p. 348) because libraries recognize when students engage, they, "…remember the experience, better understand why it matters, and be inspired to learn more," (Miller, 2014, p. 341). Student engagement is a staple in the library, providing them with space and resources, in addition to a social environment that allows students to thrive (May & Swabey, 2015). The library that recognizes this staple seeks to advance engagement beyond the norm, offering programs that are thought-provoking, influential, and memorable. One such subject that engages with students is art.

Engaging students in the arts proves to be a challenging task in the library because it is not uncommon for art students to lack connection with the library and their studio work, of which is partially effected by the student's perception of library service (Bennett, 2006; Xu & Gil, 2017). In addition, outsiders to art may have a hard time understanding the value of it because art is outside of traditional intellectual fields such as science or math. Although art is highly intelligible and adds value to society, engaging with artists and art students can be challenging (Livingston, 2010). The solution to the library is often found by promoting art contests (Cirasella & Deutch, 2012) or creating engaging projects or programs that draw art students in.

The idea in engaging art students is to be purposeful and experiential, embracing a culture of learning to cultivate their imagination, enabling the student to be motivated to engage creatively (Miller, 2014). The proactive library supports avenues that allow students to figure out their passion and develop their talents, making students the center of their work (Miller, 2014). Applying a learner-centered approach, art students may engage in a variety of programs offered by the library, including short-term projects that involve shared experiences. Art projects in group settings allows students to experience commonality and be more motivated to engage because with shared experiences, they bring greater joy and certainty of the world through influence of, "…thoughts, judgments, feelings, and actions" (Jolly, et al., 2019, p. 17; cf. Jolly, et al., 2019, pp. 15-18). The library that recognizes these opportunities and is purposeful in their engagement with the arts and art students through shared experiences and projects proves they embrace the diverse needs of students and support a culture of student success, be it learning or creative (Schlak, 2018).

Finally, blending art with faith in the library cultivates a culture that embraces faith integration and empowers students to display their faith unapologetically. The Christian librarian adheres to library standards of inclusivity and academic freedom (ALA, 2007; RUSA, 2008), but is at the advantage in a Christian university to be expressive of their motivations for student success. For example, they may openly express promoting faith in art as a service to God (Kaehr, 2008). In regards to the content of art, the Christian librarian encourages students to express their faith, creating art from a faith perspective, enabling students to recognize their God-given talents (Bower, 2010). As a leader, the librarian's role is to integrate faith through facilitation and guidance, enabling the student the freedom to express their faith, and guiding them by creating activities that enrich their understanding of faith and allowance for spiritual growth.

Project Timeline and Logistics

The timeline for the project took place over the course of a traditional academic school year, starting in the fall and concluding in the spring semester. The fall semester was dedicated to promoting the project through internal marketing. Marketing took place October through December of the fall semester, including digital marketing via a library newsletter and flyers posted throughout the library and on campus. The end of the fall semester and beginning of the second semester of December and January involved gathering student applications and conducting meetings with each applicant. The spring semester began in January and was dedicated to the student project which comprised of several individual and group/social activities. The activities varied according to depth, but were implemented to progress students' understanding of faith and art, encapsulating the project's purpose. Once the activities were implemented and completed, the project was made whole. The project concluded in May, with the final product produced in the summer. The final step did not require student participation that included assemblage of the student art pieces. After assemblage, the pieces were permanently placed in one of the university libraries. The timeline for completion was made possible through the various activities completed by students.

Participants

Participating students were selected through an application process marketed to all undergraduate and graduate students internally with flyers, posters, and email. All students were eligible to apply to promote inclusion and diversity and to show the library's commitment to student engagement (Schlak, 2018). Due to the nature of the project, a large number were art students or students with higher levels of creativity. A brief meeting with each applicant was held to describe the project and confirm participation. Participants would receive a small scholarship in varying amounts determined by level of participation, or hours given to the project, not artistic ability. A total of nine students participated at varying levels. The theme of the

project and examples of activities they would be participating in were introduced to each student prior to confirmed participation.

Project Theme and Components

A difference maker in terms of the university mission and this project is defined as a person that aims to "…make a difference in the world for Christ…," (Azusa Pacific University [APU], 2019), through transformation in work and life; that wherever individual paths may lead, one seeks to serve others and advance the kingdom of God. The *Difference Makers* project involved two components of writing and art leading to several participatory activities that completed the project.

The writing component asked students to submit stories of individuals or groups associated with the university, past or present, who are considered difference makers in their commitment to faith and service. The stories were compiled into a document along with stories composed by library staff and faculty. The stories were used as influence over the content of the art, making a connection with faith and art and to affirm that faith and knowledge, in the form of art, are in the same realm (Bower, 2010). The written stories provided the backbone to the students' objective in creating art and developing concepts.

The primary art component involved creating individually painted art pieces on repurposed book covers in varying sizes. The content of each piece represented the student's interpretation of the individual or group stories as difference makers (See Figures 3 and 4). Students were free to interpret the method or style to represent the story; for example, realism or abstract, drawing on their creative ability to story tell (Keem, et al., 2019). Each piece was grouped together to form one small and one large collage. Each collage also repurposed book cover spines to create cross shapes which were overlaid and interwoven throughout. The large collage contained

Figure 3

Figure 4

a distressed, wooden cross in the center that was surrounded by each piece. The cross encompassing the collage attested that each difference maker is surrounded by the cross, led by Christ, serving as a reflection and reminder of the resurrection story (See Figures 1 and 2). The art produced from participation in the project served as building blocks for understanding the connection of faith and art and as an introduction to expression in art and faith.
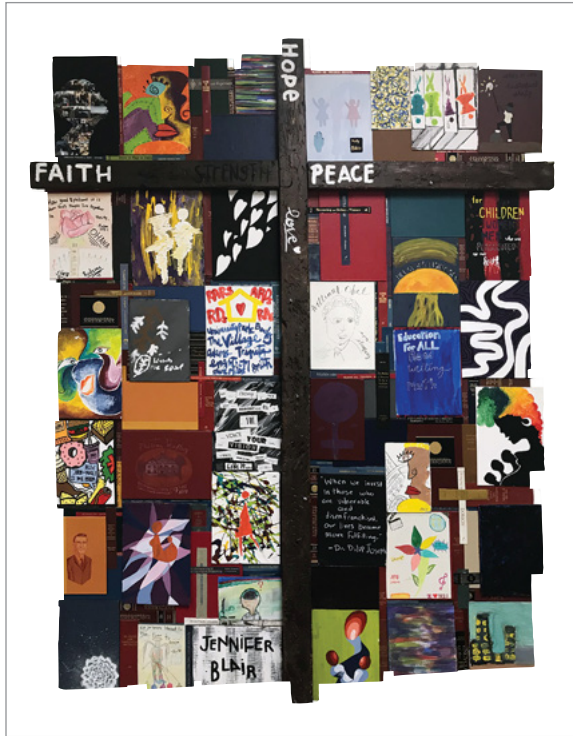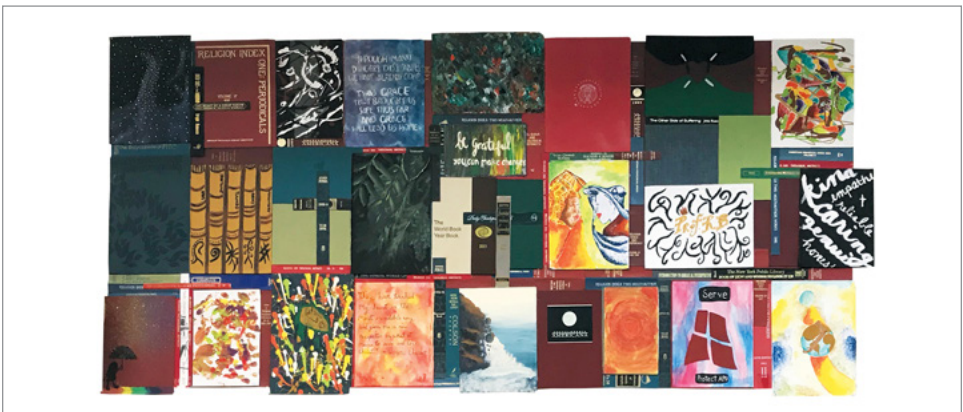

Figure 1

Figure 2

Participatory activities were integrated to engage students in their understanding and to develop a connection to faith and art, as well as the university's mission to be committed to faith and service (Hudson & Díaz Pearson, 2018). Additionally, the project introduced sharing and engagement with others through social activities. Participatory activities varied, but included group painting, distressing materials, as well as writing. The goal of the variety of activities was to acknowledge the non-study-use of the library by students (May & Swabey, 2015), to validate and strengthen the creative process (Xu & Gil, 2017), provide opportunities for reflection and validate different forms of engagement for optimal participation, providing social connections through the shared experience (Jolly, et al., 2019). Additionally, participation introduced students to think critically of the approach to expression in art and faith.

In addition to the project purpose, students were advised to think critically about the Christian worldview and the difference it makes in approaching and applying service. Students were then enabled to use their God-given abilities of art and design in expression of faith and exploration of truth (Shek &Yu, 2015), impacting the university community through corporate and communal reflection. The goals took a strengths-based approach in which students were encouraged to strengthen their skills, make connection with their skills and faith, and recognize the relational part of faith (Powell, et al., 2012; Shek & Yu, 2015). From a logistical perspective, the goals were met through participation in individual and group faith-based art and writing activities in-person and via a Google classroom. From a facilitation perspective, the goal was to incorporate a project that was traditional and timeless; a project comprised of activities that could be emulated regardless of time or generation, providing connection with faith and art.

Activities

Activities for the project were divided into two categories: group/social and individual. The activities were scheduled, but no formal data for statistics or analysis were gathered. Rather, reflective exercises or activities that required student responses were either logistical or to provoke thought and encourage spiritual growth. There were four group activities and five individual activities. The individual activities ranged in participation level. In some instances, activities were placed in the individual category because of the nature and focus on individual participation and reflection, even though more than one person may have been present.

Group and Social Activities

The group and social activities were progressive, serving as an introduction to the project, and as an opportunity to express faith in art in a group or social setting. The goal was to offer various modes of engagement to progress understanding of and encourage expression of faith and art in social settings. These activities included

an introduction and reflective exercise, a group discussion, a cross treatment that engaged the public, and painting of difference maker stories that also engaged with the public.

Introduction and Reflective Exercise

The first group activity involved an introductory meeting and a reflective exercise, gathering information on availability for future meetings and other logistics such as social activity expectations and guided reflection. The exercise asked each student to reflect on two Bible verses: Hebrews 6:10 and Matthew 5:16. After reflecting, students were asked to write down one or two reflective words. After folding the paper, they switched with another student, read it to the group and reflected on what they thought the words meant. The original author then responded and shared their thoughts. The purpose of the exercise was to make a biblical connection and add depth to the difference maker theme of the project. In addition, it presented various perspectives and peer-to-peer engagement, a vital component to establish context and introduce the shared experience, adding relevance, knowledge, and establishing a social connection (Jolly, et al., 2019).

Group Discussion

The second group activity took place via the Google classroom and was practical in nature to gather student perspectives on desired media and idea sharing. Through group discussion, students exchanged ideas about what materials they thought would work best to integrate the stories and invited deeper thought process, asking what concepts they hoped to create and to share ideas with the other students. The discussion was open-ended, allowing students opportunity to connect with each other. The purpose of this exercise was to connect the physical materials in interpreting the concept, facilitating self-directed learning (May & Swabey, 2015).

Cross Treatment

The third group and social activity asked students to participate in a cross treatment exercise in which they would stain, place nails, and distress a wooden cross. Students could participate individually or in smaller groups of two or three. The activity took place outside of one of the libraries to encourage engagement with the regular student population. The students in the project were asked to place tools and supplies alongside a wooden cross. The wooden cross was placed on the ground under a protective sheet. During each 1.5-hour session, students would purposely distress, stain or place nails on the cross.

Before students started treating the cross, they were asked to reflect on Romans 5:8, *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,"* (ESV). Treating the cross involved purposely destroying its smooth texture, serving

as the symbol, establishing a personal connection to Jesus' treatment prior to being hung on the cross. The second part of the reflection connected to the difference maker stories. Students were provided with two Bible verses for inspiration as they treated the cross, Hebrews 13:16 and Galatians 6:2, which focus on sharing with others and carrying each other's burdens. The students were asked to reflect on the connection to these verses, Jesus' sacrifice, and the sacrifice of being a difference maker. This approach fell in line with inquiry-based learning, seeking to be effective in teaching, challenging students to question and answer in a method and space not normally utilized (Miller, 2014).

While treating the cross, a sign was placed, encouraging passers-by to participate. The signs included words of the student's choosing, posing a question or statement to gather public interest and inquiry. The students were tasked with directing participants to reflect on Hebrews 13:16 and Galatians 6:2 and inviting them to join in treating the cross. During the treatment session, the students were asked to stop every 15 minutes for purposeful reflection. After the 90-minute session concluded, the students placed the cross in a drying area, and provided a reflective response in the Google classroom. Multiple purposes served in the cross treatment exercise of which included inquiry-based and visible learning techniques to encompass self-reflection, public engagement, public reflection, and creativity (Miller, 2014).

Painting Stories

The final social activity was similar in nature to the cross treatment exercise in which students were tasked in placing blank book covers, paint, and other supplies outside one of the libraries for a short session, encouraging passers-by to create an art piece that reflects a difference maker story. Existing stories were available or students could paint a person or group of their choosing. They were encouraged to interpret the difference maker story using acrylic paints in any genre including traditional and abstract. The activity was more subdued as well as creative in comparison to the cross treatment activity. Students were free to create their own concept. The primary purpose for the activity was to motivate students to participate in a shared experience, thus promote active participation, student engagement, and communal reflection, (Jolly, et al., 2019; Schlak, 2018).

Individual Activities

Five individual activities were presented in the duration of the project, all of which varied by informal versus formal, length of time, depth, and method. The goal was to present multiple avenues, methods, and opportunities for multiple learning styles. Individual activities were progressive, intentionally engaging from an introductory level to greater depth so that by the end of the project, students would have a deeper understanding and appreciation for faith integration in the arts. These activities

included a Bible verse reflection, developing a *Difference Maker* story, painting the *Difference Maker* story, a paint and faith session, and studio time.

Bible Verse Reflection

The first individual activity was posted as a discussion in the Google classroom, asking each student to share what Bible verse they thought reflects well on being a difference maker and why. Each participating student shared a Bible verse and reasoning. Responding to other students was not required, but other students were permitted to see the posts. This activity was for personal reflection, making a deeper connection with biblical perspectives and faith integration, and an initial connection prior to the activities of writing stories and creating art. This activity modeled the connection of theology to the project, reinforcing individual faith (Bower, 2010).

Difference Maker Story

The second activity involved the first actionable item. Each participating student was encouraged to nominate one person, group of people, and/or organization they considered to be a difference maker that had a connection with the university and were asked to submit a brief story to be used in the project. If the person or group was an historical figure, the student was permitted to submit the story on their behalf. Permission from the nominated person or group and one story per student was required. The activity was fundamental in connecting faith to stories and real people. When students chose someone close to them, it also developed a personal connection to the project (May & Swabey, 2015). Furthermore, it allowed connection to the latter part of the project, which was to interpret their submitted story in painted form.

Painting a Difference Maker Story

The third activity related to the previous in that students were asked to pick a difference maker story to create their first concept. If the students submitted a story, they were automatically assigned the person or group they nominated. If the student did not submit a story, they were asked to select one of the pre-written stories supplied by the library. Once selected, a concept was to be created by the student on a blank book cover using acrylic paint. No restrictions on genre or type such as abstract or realism was enforced (See Figures 3 and 4 on page 97).

Paint and Faith Session

The fourth individual activity, held in a designated location in the library, invited students to a paint and faith session. Students were asked to review pre-written stories of difference makers and select either one or three, to gather supplies, and place a timer for 40 minutes. Within that timeframe, they were tasked to create

the book cover(s) based on the stories selected. The exercise purposely sought to make a connection with the experience of the activity and the finished object by bonding the student to the familiar and symbolism, thereby reimagining faith to be tangible (Baccarini, 2018).

The numbers of one, three, and 40 were symbolic throughout the exercise. The students were asked to create either one or three concepts on one or three book covers. If one was selected, it was to be symbolic of the one Difference Maker and one God. If selecting three, the number three represented the trinity: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. With these symbols, students were tasked to think about how each book cover represented either God (1) or the trinity (3). If three was selected, students were to tasked with dedicating each piece to how the Difference Maker embodies God the Father (the creator), embodies Christ (the redeemer), and finally how one embodies the Spirit (the purifier and comforter, reflecting on the roles of the trinity, and the importance and equality of each.

The number 40 was used in the timeframe of 40 minutes, symbolic of the times it has been used in the Bible for various purposes. For instance, it appears as a promise, time of reflection, and in various forms of time including years of reign in a kingdom, age, times of rest, or time to emphasize a spiritual truth. Examples of passages and people were provided including Noah and the 40-day flood (*Genesis 7*), Moses on Mt. Sinai for 40 days (*Exodus 24 & 34*), the Israelites wandering the desert for 40 years (*Numbers 14*), and the 40 days of Jesus' fasting (*Matthew 4*), temptation period (*Luke 4*), and time on earth after the resurrection (*Acts 1*). When asked to reflect on this number, students used the time to endure for Christ, be disciplined, seek peace, and be humbled in the creation process. After the 40 minutes concluded, students stopped their creation process. The purpose of the activity was to strengthen their understanding of faith, using tangible, relatable actions in addition to developing an understanding of God in connection with the difference maker story.

Studio Time

The final individual activity included studio time. Outside of the formal or appointed activities, students were given an opportunity to use a designated space in the library to paint stories. Time slots were provided throughout the duration of the project, formal check-ins were not required, and supplies were provided. The studio time was made available to allow for flexibility of schedules and encourage participation, reinforcing the value of art and faith through creation (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006).

The *Difference Makers* project provided a faith integration and art project not previously offered in the library, exposing students to a new outlook, adding

value and greater knowledge to programs the library offers. The library provided an avenue to produce the project outside the classroom, attracting students to participate voluntarily, thus allowing personal connection to the students' creativity and faith. For instance, general guidelines of themes were provided, but without the pressure of the project being graded, students were free to create reflective of their style. Primarily inquiry-based and self-directed learning methods were employed, allowing the project to be learner-centered. Finally, the library sought out one of the hardest to reach group of students, permitting the validity of art with students recognizing the library as a place that acknowledges the value of art. The results of the project varied by activity and were determined by observation and completed concepts or art produced. The categories included: *Art Content*, *Shared Experiences*, *Participation and Commitment*, *Faith and Art*, and *Reflection*.

Art Content

The content of the art resulted in much higher creativity than originally presumed. For example, more realistic content was expected, but a large majority of pieces were abstract, playful, or interpretive (See Figure 5). Because participating students were not expected to be art majors, the individually painted pieces were not expected to be highly artistic. However, many of the pieces, reflective of difference makers of various people and groups, were colorful, highly conceptual, and reflective of the intent of the project: To connect the content of the stories, integrate faith, and engage in activities that encourage the embodiment of faith in art. The finished pieces, assembled as a collage, proved the creativity of the students as well their ability to tell a story (See Figures 1 and 2 on page 98).
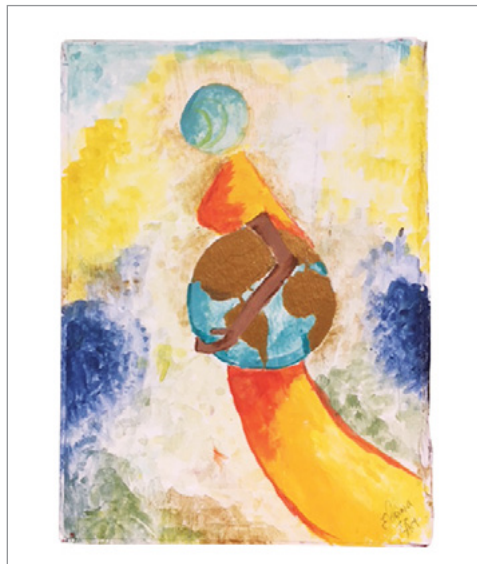
Figure 5

Shared Experiences

The nature of the project gave opportunity to participate in groups or teams to develop social connection with shared experiences (Jolly, et al., 2019; Schlak, 2018). What was most surprising was the voluntary participation of the group with the public. Connections and friendships were formed and social activities with the public was shared with fellow students rather than individualized. For instance, a pair of graduate students strengthened their friendship by participating in individual activities together, and these students confidently invited outside participants to engage in activities. After the project concluded, these two graduate students continued to form bonds, and made frequent visits to the library to engage and inquire about future projects.

Participation and Commitment

On an individual level, it was expected that some students were going to participate more than others. Those who highly participated appeared to have a strong connection with the project. For instance, the finished pieces were high in number or highly creative. Connections were also made with the library faculty member on a more personal level after the project concluded. For example, students frequently stopped by the library for conversation and fellowship.

Faith and Art

From a faith perspective, participating students and the public, or passers-by participating in group activities enjoyed the activities and were challenged to think more reflectively on its theme and the connection to faith. Their enjoyment was primarily expressed through facial expressions, excitement to participate, and time spent on the activity. The literal hammering of the cross made a vital connection to one's personal faith and their role. The painting of the stories merged two forms of art, encouraging faith to be an element in art. The result of the faith aspect was not measured. Rather, the goal was to reinforce faith as an important element in creativity, providing connection and encouragement for spiritual growth.

The *'Difference Makers'* faith and art project, made possible by an internal faith integration project grant, encompassed various elements to encourage participation. The small scholarship permitted an incentive for initial participation, but was not the main focus. The project incorporated formal and informal activities so that students were encouraged to participate on various levels and in multiple learning capacities. The project sought to acknowledge art as a means to integrate faith, a topic, as noted in the literature review, not often granted respect or acceptance in the secular art field or lacking recognition in the Christian university setting. On a corporate level, the purpose of the project was to allow integration of faith in an art project, to gain further acceptance, and warrant a path for future projects, acknowledging the library as a staple for student engagement. Although the project was set within one academic

year, the theme and type of project is not limited to a strict timeline. Rather, the theme may be altered to fit the mission of other Christian universities. It is also not incumbent on large university funding. As such, a purpose of this project is to give merit to art and faith projects, acknowledging the library's role in student engagement, thereby adding a pathway to students' shared experiences and spiritual growth.

Conclusion

The goals of the project were a success in that a small, devoted group of students committed to the project and were open to incorporating faith in their art. Expectations for a greater number of students were anticipated because of the incentive of a small scholarship. Despite fewer participants than projected, the concentrated group provided ample participation, with approximately a third of students showing enthusiasm and willingness. One student in particular was so enthusiastic, she took every opportunity to create and express herself by producing multiple art pieces. The commitment to group activities was expected to be lower due to varying schedules, but what was surprising was the willingness to get others involved. For example, in the *cross treatment* activity, they were asked to get attention of other students. Although hesitation was expected, the reality was much different, with participant's having a natural willingness to get others involved. Because faith expression in art can be very personal, this element in individual and group activities was also expected to be less vocal and participatory. Some students were more reserved while others more vocal. But the results were one of openness and willingness. What was most surprising were the relationships that formed with students. Two graduate students in particular sought me out during and after the project was over to keep the connection going. Overall, the project was a success, and if given another opportunity, I would develop and embark on something similar because it is important to continue to develop ideas of faith expression. To continually engage with people on a deeper level and to provide a means for faith expression is a priority that enables students to grow spiritually and make deeper connection with faith and their abilities. ✠

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