

**Art Inspirations:**  
**An Executive Summary of Billoni's 2002**  
**Master's Project**

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## Overview

The objective of Anthony Billoni's 2002 Master's project, *The Art Gallery Excursion as a Bridge to Idea Generation and a Heightened Aesthetic Experience* was to answer the questions "Will a creativity excursion in an art gallery yield useful ideas?" and "Can novel and useful ideas generated by looking at art help develop a heightened art experience?" He was inspired by W.J.J. Gordon's Synectics© and Geschka's Visual Synectics technique of taking a physical excursion to an art gallery, rather than using pictures/photographs, in order to assist in the generation of ideas.

A pilot study was developed with Dr. Mary Murdock at the International Center for Creative Studies at Buffalo State College in Buffalo, New York. The pilot Art Gallery Excursion took place at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center in Buffalo, New York using paintings, artifacts and temporary exhibits. There were 21 participants in the March of 2000 study (Billoni, p. 19).

Following the pilot study, Billoni selected two groups of adults who participated in the Art Gallery Excursions. Both had varying degrees of idea generating training. He expected the participants would have a newfound respect for the inspirational effects of art in a gallery setting and "use the art as a stimulus to generate ideas to a personally relevant challenge" (Billoni, p. 3).

Billoni found the Art Gallery Excursion allowed all the participants to develop their own challenge and generate useful ideas to that challenge. The participants also had a positive orientation to art as a result of the experience.

### **Literature Approaches**

Billoni researched related literature on two major topics: antecedent tools and aesthetic experience. Synectics©, Visual Synectics© and incubation were all antecedent tools he researched. W.J.J. Gordon led the group that began the basis of Synectics© in 1944. When George Prince joined the group in 1959, Synectics© Education Systems soon formed. "Synectics© uses analogies and metaphors to both analyze and problem solve and develop possible solutions" (Billoni, 2002, p. 5). This can be done by "making the strange familiar" or "making the familiar strange".

Visual Synectics or Visual Confrontation, developed by researchers at Bataille Institute in the 1970's, was the second antecedent tool. Visual Synectics begins with analysis and understanding the problem. Then a picture is shown and briefly described by members of the group. Idea development through "forced fit" and "illumination" complete the process.

The third antecedent tool Billoni used was incubation. According to Wallace, incubation takes place when we detach ourselves from the

problem and do not consciously think of the challenge. While we attend to other things in life, ideas or solution to that challenge come to mind (Billoni, p.9).

The second topic of research, aesthetic experience, was defined by Billoni as "a personal orientation to art" (p. 11). Billoni also relied on Dewey's (1934) definition of aesthetic experience as a guide for the project:

The experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered movement. This artistic structure may be immediately felt. In so far, it is esthetic (author's spelling). What is even more important is that not only is the quality a significant motive in understanding intellectual inquiry and in keeping it honest, but no intellectual activity is an integral event (is an experience), unless it is rounded out with this quality. Without it, thinking is inconclusive. In short, esthetic cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience since the latter must bear an esthetic stamp to be itself complete (as cited in Billoni, 2002, p.12).

Billoni found that the art experience was an inspirational event. He quotes Worts (1995) who says:

To paraphrase Picasso (and many other artists for that matter), in producing artwork, the artist carries the creative process *half* way- it is the responsibility of the viewer to complete the process. The visitor centered half of the creative process is

based on the personalizing of symbolic objects (as cited in Billoni, 2002, p. 166).

### **The Study Itself**

The first Art Gallery Excursion, September 1, 2000, was held at Rich Products headquarters in Buffalo, New York. The second was at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery on March 29, 2001. The two groups consisted of male and female adults over age 21, with varying degrees of idea generating training. Approximately 50 paintings were viewed by twelve managerial level employees of Rich Products Corporation participating in Excursion one. The second Excursion to the Albright-Knox consisted of eighteen In-Room Plus employees. Members of the Rich's group had varying levels of training in Creative Problem Solving tools and techniques. Those in the In-Room group had very little CPS experience, if any.

### **Method Findings**

Billoni analyzed the thesis questions of this project using qualitative and quantitative models based on tables and techniques developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Housen(1983). Question one was "Did the excursion help produce ideas that could help solve personal challenges?" (Billoni, 2002, p. 23). The participants incubated while viewing the artwork and were instructed to find connections or make a forced fit with the challenges they had

previously developed. Answers to question one (a convergent question) were compiled and placed on a grid to define the level of success in answering the question.

The participants answered several short answer questions after completing the Art Gallery Experience such as: "Are you familiar with deliberate creativity and idea generating processes?" "How many personal challenges did you take into the gallery?" "Did any idea occur to you that might help solve your challenge?" "How many (ideas) per challenge?" The data from each excursion were analyzed separately and compared. The majority of the participants generated ideas to a developed personal challenge although there is an evident difference in the number of ideas that were generated by each group. Billoni concluded this was due to the experience or lack of experience in CPS tools and techniques.

The results of thesis question two "Can useful ideas generated by looking at art help develop a new orientation to the art experience?" (Billoni, 2002. p. 28) identified relationships between the idea generation that took place and any "unrelated inspirations" as a result of the art experience itself. Most of the members of the Rich's group experienced "unrelated inspirations" more frequently than the members of the In-Room group. Once again Billoni concluded there could be a relationship between the number of inspirations and the

familiarity with creativity tools among members of each group. Billoni found the inspirational comments were positive and that he “could map the universe of comments to the same progression from excursion, to the art they were looking at, to their personal situation” (p.31).

Additionally, Billoni found the Art Gallery Excursions were a means to prove personal fulfillment can be achieved by experiencing art without having education in the art field or being an art professional. He was not attempting to train or educate the participants about particular pieces of art during the excursions. His goal was reached, clearly explained and documented, and he provides ideas/suggestions to add depth and breadth to future Art Gallery Excursions.

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