College of Liberal Arts

Diversity and Inclusion Resource Module

Participatory Art

Dr. James P. Werner
Art & Design and STS, California Polytechnic State University

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Overview of Participatory Art Teaching Module

Museums and galleries are evolving into interactive spaces where visitors are often confronted with opportunities to engage with artwork, and engage each other in unique, mediated ways. The works often focus on critical representations of social and cultural issues. As practices in contemporary art include more spaces of active participation, the role that relational spaces and events play is important in understanding how social activism and awareness are communicated in 21st century art.

The module is presented in two parts. The first part covers a general history of participatory art practices beginning in the mid 20th century, its evolution in the mid 1990s and how it is being defined today. The second part covers different artists and the unique participatory art practices they are associated with.

In the mid 20th century experimental practices with audience participation were aimed at "antiart," and sought to underscore a revolutionary mode of thinking about the practice and process of art. Artists at this time sought to change the focus from an end product made by the artist to be passively contemplated, to an interaction involving audiences. Artists became facilitators of creative happenings for others to activate or create. With the introduction of video, sound, remote sensors, and eventually web based media, new mediums offered a variety of ways for audiences to be immersed in, or manipulate spaces and images to participate in creative events.

The 1990's saw a number of different approaches to participatory practices whereby the subject of the piece became the self-reflective viewer. In the United States works reflected social agendas and sometimes political agendas, were aimed at marginalized communities, and brought people together with aesthetically oriented activities. In Europe the curator and theorist Bourriaud coined the phrase Relational Aesthetics, stating that participatory works are based on human relations and their social contexts. These works challenged boundaries between public and private space. Artists like Felix Gonzalez-Torres developed interactive spaces to raise awareness about issues of gay rights, the AIDS crisis and also gun violence. Contemporary works, such as those of Oliver Herring, involve open public spaces designed to bring people together through creative collaboration in dynamic and enjoyable activities. Such works are aimed at overcoming problems of socialization and creating social change. While critics continue to debate the defining criteria for participatory art (and many believe there are none), they agree that audience participation is effective in creating value for potential social and aesthetic awareness.

Students will learn about different approaches artists have taken to making these interactive spaces and events, and how they have related to issues of politics, power, activism and socialization. They will review and discuss supporting theories such as those of Nicolas Bourriaud and Clair Bishop and understand how the development of these practices has translated to online collaborations and helped contribute to the evolution of traditional

frameworks in art. The module includes a wide variety of descriptions and media resources of participatory artwork from the past 30 years.

Outline for Participatory Art Teaching Module

- I. Participatory and relational practices in fine art
 - a. Mid 20th century Happenings and Fluxus participatory practices
 - Participation in art has its roots in the Happenings and Fluxus movements of 50s and 60s. Happenings were first coined by Allan Kaprow and referred to as "art events." The Fluxus and Happenings movements rejected white cube, inanimate object making and sought to involve audiences in an action oriented event. (See H. Higgins, 2002)
 - Situationist artist Guy Debord (1968) argued that participation art
 "rehumanized a society rendered numb and fragmented by the
 repressive instrumentality of capitalist production." He called for an art
 that rejected objects for passive consumption. (see Claire Bishop pg.
 11-12)
 - b. Relational Aesthetics and Participatory Art
 - The term was coined by curator Nicolas Bourriaud. He suggested that relational works are based on human relations and their social contexts. The essay defines a new direction in art where interaction with people and the sociability of daily life were the primary focus, as opposed to art being separate and unique from everyday life. This brought a renewed attention to participatory practices and some categorizations of them. (see M. Kelly, 2014; also A. Downy, 2007)
 - Critics of Relational Aesthetics separate Bourriaud's definition of
 participatory works from other participatory art practices. Mainly the
 critic Claire Bishop argues that gallery and museum based works
 perpetuate high art ideals and class politics while community based
 participations have a more genuine appeal to socially aware art.
 She also suggests that governmentally sanctioned participatory works
 reinforce a conservative, fiscally minded agenda, not challenging the
 status quo, and undermining inclusivity and diversity.
 - c. Types of engagements vary for Participatory Art, but they are always a creative action through the participation of people, facilitated by an artist or collective. Some categories that have been identified are as follows: (See Michael Kelly, 2014)
 - Voluntary social engagement; collaborative; relational
 - Activist; socially engaged; interventionist
 - Antagonistic; Destabilizing
 - d. Some participatory artists of the 1990s and early 2000's often associated with Relational Aesthetics:
 - Felix Gonzalez Torres works included topics on gay rights, aids and gun violence.

- Rirkrit Tiravanija Untitled (Free) a defining work referenced in Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics theory. Offering shared food and conversation to everyone.
- Tania Bruguera addresses power relationships between politics and everyday life
- e. Contemporary galleries and museums become more interactive in the 21st century. The infusion of digital, web based and virtual technologies into art practices has seen the modes of participatory engagements expand to varieties of mediums and methodologies. Museums have begun to change their venues and exhibit more participatory works that utilize technology to facilitate collaborative experiences for critical examination aimed at constructive social awareness. (See Peter Weibel, 2002)
- f. Many contemporary participatory artists practice without technology, bringing attention to the importance of positive person to person interactions. A few are:
 - Oliver Herring TASK series, focused on playful instructions to incite potential interaction between people.
 - Tino Sehgal Dialogic works designed to offer intimate and moving conversations with strangers.
 - Marina Abromovic Personal engagements with people evoking emotional responses from participants.
- g. Participatory artists who have used social media and new technologies as collaborative platforms for art installations:
 - Miranda July and Harrel Fletcher Web based collaboration around instructional tasks.
 - J.R. community based activist work on a global scale
 - Rafael Lozano Hemmer technology installations with crowd data and via live projected telepresence.

Annotated Bibliography for Instructors

Fluxus Experience

This section of the chapter titled Fluxus, Happenings, Conceptual and Pop Art, describes practices and intensions of Fluxus and Happenings artists. Both movements sought to remove boundaries between the artist and viewer, and to find art within life experiences. It gives descriptions of some works, and explains the relationship between the two movements. Unlike relational aesthetics and contemporary participatory practices, Fluxus sought affirmed individual autonomy and conceptual thinking. The works generally had no specific communicative purpose other than engagement with and at the same time, withdraw from everyday life. Similarly, the Happenings movement started by Alan Kaprow sought to create events for artists and viewers alike to contribute to. Influenced by action painting (abstract expressionism) Happenings works were largely action oriented, with groups of people taking part in action oriented performances with an emphasis on narrative. It essentially concludes that Happenings and Fluxus were almost identical avant-garde movements focusing on life-like art, with the exception of the activist/political agendas of Fluxus leader George Maciunas. Higgins, H. (2002). Fluxus Experience. pp. 101-113. Berkley, CA. University of California Press.

Avant-Garde Figures in Fluxus Art

This is short description and list of a variety of Fluxus associated artists with some image examples. This list describes practices related to the anti-establishment art movement at the time. It is a resource to use as examples when explaining the roots of participation art in mid 20th century art practices. It includes descriptions of John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik.

Pereira, L. (2016, May 13). *The Most Avant-Garde Figures in Fluxus Art*. Wide Walls. https://www.widewalls.ch/fluxus-art-prominent-artists/

Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics.

This article explicates the theory of Relational Aesthetics written by Nicolas Bourriaud in detail. It describes the main arguments and lists examples of artists used to define the theory. It explains how the theory fits into a politics of contemporary aesthetics, with it arguing for a new direction in art that upholds "relations of exchange, social interplay and inter-subjective communication". These practices are less about creating political art and more so creating an awareness of the sociopolitical ramifications of relational events.

Downey, A. *Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics.* Third Text, vol. 21, no. 3, May 2007, pp. 267–275. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/09528820701360534.

(Permalink): http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a ph&AN=25272252&site=ehost-live

What is Relational Aesthetics: Here's How Hanging Out, Eating Dinner, and Feeling Awkward Became Art

A very brief overview of the general idea of relational aesthetics.

Art Space Editors. (2016). What is Relational Aesthetics: Here's How Hanging Out, Eating Dinner, and Feeling Awkward Became Art. [internet] Art Space: The Phaidon Folio. https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/book_report/what-is-relational-aesthetics-54164

Participatory Art

This essay explains the premise and short history of Participatory Art practices since the 1990's and categorizes general types of participatory works. These include activist, socially engaged, interventionist, antagonistic and destabilizing works. The article discusses the works of Rirkrit Tiravanija, Tania Bruguera and the community-based Project Row Houses (1994). It talks about how these are related to Bourriaud's definition of Relational Aesthetics and discusses the critique and criticisms of relational and participatory methodologies, mainly those of Claire Bishop, and some of the shortcomings of the attempt to define participatory art under any particular category or rule. It calls into question the usefulness of claiming a community based endeavor like Project Row Houses to be an art project, instead of a social services one, for the goal of funding. It also points out how artists have approached this concern by not claiming to be a socially effective endeavor.

Kelly, M. (2014). *Participatory Art.* Encyclopedia of Aesthetics. Oxford, UK. Oxford University Press.

Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship

Claire Bishop's book is a critique of participatory art theories and practices. This excerpt reviews the roots of social cooperation, post Happenings and Fluxus movements. She discusses Guy Debord's "Situationists" movement of the 1960's as a driver of the idea that repressive capitalist production enslaves the public in a consumer spectacle. Debord calls for a new, participatory, action based art free of objects for passive consumption to repair social bonds. Bishop argues that current avant-garde artists make social situations that are politically engaged and a part of life. Bishop also suggests that it is important to have critique of social practice as art so as not to accept any approach. This helps develop institutional rigor. While criteria will vary from critic to critic, Bishop argues that work that seeks to continue the status quo of politically motivated community endeavors often fails to be art as it seeks to uphold socially inclusive governmental agendas towards verifiable outcomes. This reinforces conservative cultural hierarchies, closes down the road to diversity, and ultimately is aimed at supporting government fiscal agendas. Bishop is a critic of Bourriaud's definitions and examples of relational aesthetics, arguing in support of works that don't uphold preexisting, closed art world values that reinforce class politics. Community based interactions such as those of Thomas Hirschhorn's Bataille Monument (2010) avoid traditional art frameworks, being located outside a gallery or museum, and exist (more appropriately for Bishop) only as a result of local community contributions to a conversation.

Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* pp.111-117. New York, NY. Verso.

Web 2.0 and the Museum

Curator and theorist Peter Weibel writes about the future of museum and gallery archival practices. Weibel makes the case for a radical change in the way we think about choosing and collecting artists and artwork in the 21st century. With the advent of the digital age and global access to information and each other, he suggests that institutions and historians open themselves to the idea that participatory and collective creativity become an accepted representation in the museum of the future. The essay represents the underlying current of practices in participatory digital and media arts of the past decade.

Weibel, P. (2011). Web 2.0 and the Museum. In O. Grau (Ed.), Imagery in the 21st Century (pp. 235-243). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

DOI:10.7551/mitpress/9780262015721.003.0013

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

This article summarizes the ideas of this relational aesthetics artist who created political, activist and socially relevant works that called for audience action, bringing attention to one's own relationship to the topic. His work included subjects of gay rights, aids, gun violence, and inclusivity. It is presented as an example of one of the early 1990's participatory artists. The Art Story Contributors. (2017) *Felix Gonzalez-Torres Artist Overview and Analysis*. [internet] TheArtStory.org. https://www.theartstory.org/artist/gonzalez-torres-felix/

This article describes in detail a number works by Gonzalez-Torres. It includes discussion of the piece "Death by gun," (DATE) a participatory piece that referenced minimalism while calling attention to the audience's involvement as a political act that also activated and called for personal interpretation; "Untitled" (Portrait Ross in LA) 1990, a work that referenced the artist's partner who had recently died from aids, and asked the audience to take a piece from a massive pile of candy in the gallery; "Go-Go Dancer" 1991 is a type of Happening performance that creates a homoerotic moment in the gallery, contesting the dominant heterosexual references and the marginalization of gay artists in art history.

The Art Story Contributors. (2017) Felix Gonzalez-Torres Artist Overview and Analysis. [internet] TheArtStory.org. https://www.theartstory.org/artist/gonzalez-torres-felix/artworks/#pnt 1

Annotated Bibliography for Students

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What is Relational Aesthetics: Here's How Hanging Out, Eating Dinner, and Feeling Awkward Became Art

A very brief overview of the general idea of relational aesthetics

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Dinner, and Feeling Awkward Became Art. [internet] Art Space: The Phaidon Folio.

https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/book_report/what-is-relational-aesthetics-54164

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Relational Aesthetics artist who created political and socially relevant works that called for audience action, bringing attention to one's own relationship to the topic. His work included subjects of gay rights, aids, gun violence, and inclusivity. This article summarizes the artist's key ideas.

The Art Story Contributors. (2017) *Felix Gonzalez-Torres Artist Overview and Analysis*. [internet] TheArtStory.org. https://www.theartstory.org/artist/gonzalez-torres-felix/

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Weibel, P. (2011). Web 2.0 and the Museum. In O. Grau (Ed.), Imagery in the 21st Century (pp. 235-243). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

DOI:10.7551/mitpress/9780262015721.003.0013

Artist References (and Media) for Students and Instructors

Rirkrit Tiravanija – "Untitled (Free)"

A short overview of the series work "Untitled (Free)" 1992-2012 commonly cited as a defining work for Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics theory. The performance and social situation transformed the gallery space into an inviting place where people could share a meal and conversation with the artist and others.

Stokes, R. (2012, Feb. 3). *Rirkrit Tiravanija: Cooking Up an Art Experience*. [internet]. Inside/Out. https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/02/03/rirkrit-tiravanija-cooking-up-an-art-experience/

Tania Bruguera - "Tatlin's Whisper #5"

This is a description of the 2008 work "Tatlin's Whisper #5" and a short overview of the Tania Bruguera as artist. She creates works that force audiences to deal with power relationships and address the dynamics of politics, art and daily life. The work is also described in "Participatory Art" by Michael Kelly, 2014 referenced above.

Barson, T. (2008, June). Tania Bruguera: Tatlin's Whisper #5. [internet] Tate. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bruguera-tatlins-whisper-5-t12989

Oliver Herring - "Task"

This article in the New York Times describes the background and details of Oliver Herring's participatory art series titled "Task". His work focuses on people connecting with each other without issues of ownership or permanence, opening up space for potential interaction based on variable sets of instructions. The article includes an interview with Herring, comments from

the curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D. C. where his work was hosted, and descriptions of his work "Task" in Madison Square Park in NYC. Grimes, W. (2014, Sept. 7). *Making Art on the Spot and on the Fly*. [internet] New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/08/arts/design/oliver-herring-at-a-task-party-at-madison-square-park.html

A short video of the installation of Oliver Herring's "Task," in New York's Madison Square Park. Foster, I. (2014, Sept 26). *Task.* [internet]. Art 21.

https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/oliver-herring-task-short/

Marina Abromovic - "The Artist is Present"

In her work actor participants engage audiences to open awareness about themselves. In the piece "The Artist is Present" at MoMA, NYC, 2010, Abromovic engaged public participants in silent, visual conversation.

MoMA Learning. (2010). The Artist is Present. [internet]. MoMA.

https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/marina-abramovic-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-2010/

Video narrative by Abromovic of "The Artist is Present," 2010.

Milica, Z. (2012). *Marina Abromovic on performing Artist is Present*. [internet]. Marina Abromovic Institute. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Qj s8mNU

Project Row Houses, 1994 - Present

This is the website for the community based participatory art project that has grown into a large scale community activism organization over two decades. A description and critique of this project is found in the reading "Participatory Art" by Mark Kelly listed above. Explore Project Row Houses here. ¹

Tino Sehgal – "This Progress"

Participatory artists who stages spaces of collaborative conversation. The work is focused on social engagement that produces consequences for the audience.

This article is a description with a variety of testimonials from the 300 volunteers taking part in Tino Sehgal's participatory art piece titled "This Progress" at the Guggenheim Museum, New York 2010.

Desantis, A. (2010, March 12). At the Guggenheim, the Art Walked Beside You, Asking Questions. The New York Times.

https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/arts/design/13progress.html

An interview with Tino Sehgal discussing the ideas behind his participation works.

¹ Project Row Houses: https://projectrowhouses.org/

Collins, L. (2012, July 30). *The Question Artist: Tino Sehgal's Provocative Encounters*. The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/08/06/the-question-artist

Artist J.R. - "Inside Out" Project

These two Ted Talk videos explain the project "Inside Out", developed by J.R. The artist has installed building-size images of people from oppressed, abused and marginalized communities in dozens of graffiti style installations around the world. He allows anyone to submit images of people in their community, which he then prints at large scale and sends back to them so they can create public installations themselves. The project embraces inclusivity, unique cultural identity and difference in communities where there is oppression and underrepresentation. Find the two Ted Talks at this link.²

TED Talks. (2011, March). My Wish: Use art to turn the world inside out. [internet]. TED. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PAy1zBtTbw

TED Talks. (2012, May). *One year of turning the world inside out*. [internet]. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/jr one year of turning the world inside out#t-354895

Miranda July and Harrel Fletcher – "Learning to Love You More"

Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher's *Learning to Love You More* was a website that posted instructions called "assignments" for the public to act out, then post the results to the site. People around the globe sought out, interacted with, and created events, photos and comments. Each were considered artworks in themselves. The instructions and the production of art continued until 2009. Participants had significant influences on each other as instruction and responses began getting more and more obscure. The site and works were acquired by the San Francisco Museum of Art in 2010 and, here is the important point, people have continued to collaborate on this idea by creating their own sites with new assignments that are continuously evolving.

https://rhizome.org/art/artbase/artwork/learning-to-love-you-more/

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

An interview with the prolific interactive and participatory artist who uses advanced technologies to expand the experience and depth of meaning in his installation works. Loos, T. (2018, Oct. 26). *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer Is a Crowd Pleaser. He's Also Obsessed With Death.* The New York Times.

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/arts/design/rafael-lozano-hemmer-hirshhorn.html

<u>See Sandbox (2010)</u>³, a participatory public space installation that requires collaboration for positive experiences with surveillance related technologies:

Lozano-Hemmer, R. (2010). *Sandbox.* [internet]. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/artworks/sandbox.php

² "Inside Out Project" Ted Talk videos: http://www.insideoutproject.net/en

³ Video of "Sandbox" by Rafael Lazano Hemmer http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/artworks/sandbox.php

Tips and Pitfalls

- The commodity value of an object is not equal to a participatory work for the artist and an institution. Therefore, participatory works are not as common or celebrated as tangible, passive objects have been in art history. That being said, technology advances have sparked interactivity and collaboration in the art, and the past decade we have seen an insurgence of conceptually based, participatory practices that embrace all types of technology. The examples given here are a small sample of the array of contemporary art works that encourage participation.
- Students may be less familiar with art that isn't tangible, for purchase, or associated
 with one individual. Art has historically applied ownership to projects, and this can be
 problematic if the works are developed by a group. Critics and historians like to discuss
 who is responsible for the work, and the institution of art leans towards celebrating
 individuals.
- Along with literature review, this topic requires viewing of a variety of artworks and videos. Each work approaches the topic of participation and collaboration differently. It's important for students to review a variety of approaches that artists have tested. While the categories of participatory practice help to place works within a communicative framework, as early practices in participation art have shown, there are no rules as to the topic or methodology one uses to invite audiences to create and collaborate. What's more is technology and social media can offer a multi-faceted approach to audience participation. Depending on the goal of the piece, works mediated by technology can offer a more inclusive, safe and inviting atmosphere for people to work together, but they also have the power to alienate people from real world experiences and the connections often sought by participatory practices.
- The Terms "interactivity" and "participatory" are separate terms in art. Interactivity suggests a one to one relationship of viewer with a work; participatory connotes involvement of many people. (see Bishop, p. 2?)
- It is important to note that early practices in participatory art sought to reject and change the notion of white cube gallery, commodity oriented art production, while contemporary approaches to participation support new modes of engagement, including technological ones, that foster social participation and creative play.
- 21st century participatory works are culturally and critically focused, often seeking to
 inform and empower viewers through engagement and self-awareness. In my
 experience, student groups excel at relational project collaborations when the topic and
 methodology are developed by them (instead of being assigned to them). This approach
 gives them ownership of the of the project and reinforces the notion of producer as the
 facilitator of relatable experience instead of a presenter of information.

Module Activity #1

Discussion

After reviewing the general history and variety of artists making participatory art, students should break into groups of three. Each group should identify two artworks they felt would be particularly effective in inciting participation while also bringing attention to a social, cultural or political issue(s). After groups have made their choices, each should discuss the questions below amongst themselves. Someone from each group should write down the answers. When complete, the groups discuss their answers with the class.

When answering these questions, consider the terms for participatory art mentioned in Michael Kelly's essay Participatory Art (2014): relational, activist, socially engaged, antagonistic and destabilizing.

Questions:

- 1. Which of terms of participatory art does each of the works you chose fit with?
- 2. What aspect of the interaction with the audience do you think makes these pieces effective, and why?
- 3. Participation artists often choose to represent everyday life experiences while calling attention to underlying issues. How do these two works represent a common, yet politically or socially revealing experience you can relate to in your own daily life?
- 4. Which work(s) did your group find less appealing or effective as a work of art? Why?
- 5. Having reviewed a variety of participatory works, define some of the parameters you feel made some works more, or less effective. When answering, consider the venue of public or community space vs. gallery space, and how atmosphere and outcome may help to define audience expectation and experience.
- 6. How are the few web and digital works different from other works you reviewed?

Module Activity #2

Practicing Participation

Students should complete activity #1 in class and have read and discussed a variety of participatory art methodologies.

Consider the types of participatory works you have seen: dialogic, antagonistic, interventionist community based, etc. Working in small teams, design and then give a class presentation of a critically aimed, interactive experience related to diversity and inclusivity. Your event can be a puzzle, game, conversation, space for discussion, installation bringing people together in a common task, or other type of space for people to interact. It should have a name, a theme, be open to all, and be collaborative.

Deliverable Components

- 8-10 minute Project Pitch
- 8 presentation slides, minimum. Consider developing diagrams and sample images.
- Create or perform a demonstration for the presentation if possible.

Considerations for Development

- Choose an underlying topic first, identifying an issue that you feel is relevant to people in everyday life.
- Early participatory art was influenced by minimalism. Often participatory works are
 effective when the activity has an indirect relationship with its social implications. For
 example, Felix Gondolas-Torres' "Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)" and Oliver Herring's
 Task projects are simple actions and activities that instigate reflection. Other works,
 however, are more direct, such as J.R.'s "Inside Out" project or Lozano Hemmer's
 "Sandbox".
- Which category of engagement does your idea most relate to? Identifying this will help you determine the venue and details of engagement that will be most effective.
- How does the project relate to our readings and examples? Note influential ideas and practices that have informed your process.
- What are you hoping the audience or community takeaway from the experience? Are there alternative reactions that you anticipate? If so, should the modes of activity be readdressed, or are they important to your potential outcomes?
- Does this work have the potential to create social change? Why or why not?

Suggestions Before Presenting

- Test your idea then refine / develop / alter / commit.
- Share your work and get feedback from outside groups/associates.
- Present your feedback findings and any changes you've made based on testing when you present.

When the groups present their project ideas, each student in the class should write down 3 questions or suggestions to offer the presenters.