

PATHWAYS TO GLOBAL COMMUNICATION
REFLECTIVE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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Part 1

Reflecting on Theory, Practice, and Communication

- What is your teaching philosophy?

Art is a subject that requires a combination of specific skills and knowledge and a large amount of creative motivation. To inspire students to be creatively motivated requires projects that impart the specific skills and knowledge in a way that allows them to find their own visual solutions. Many of the specific skills are those of seeing, of analyzing and understanding what they see in the world and in their work, in addition to the ability to use materials to achieve specific objectives.

I believe in experiential learning, which requires students to be involved and engaged in the content. No matter how many times a student is shown, it is only until they themselves have done it that they have learned it. And to arrive at that learning, they have to internalize the process so that they can further improve their abilities and understanding of what they are learning on their own.

One approach to this is to create projects that require the student to formulate the problem – that is, a student-centered approach to the content. With homework projects, asking students to extend the class content to individual interests can reinforce the learning in more personal and creative ways.

There must also be reflective observation of the process, hence critique of work is important. I believe verbal review of work done by students is a fundamental means of reinforcing a student's engagement with their own visual process. That is, by analyzing another student's work as well as their own, they are revisiting and building on their understanding of what they themselves have done in creating visual work with specific parameters and criteria to be reviewed and evaluated.

I also believe students need exposure to their professional world in addition to using their own interests toward artistic motivation. This now-global world includes art history and museums, contemporary art galleries, and a community of artists made up of their peers and current members of the profession here and abroad. To this end, the need to study and be engaged by art history is very important, as well as seeing and responding to art exhibitions in museums, galleries, and other venues. Relevant activities and events that encourage thoughtful participation and further their exposure to the contemporary art world and life after college should be supported.

My role is to give students the opportunity for them to show themselves what they are capable of, to find their own paths of discovery in which they learn how they can create artwork and grow on their own. Seeing students engaged in the process, using their increased knowledge and abilities toward their own ends, and their unexpected self-discovery in the work they produce is what makes teaching especially satisfying for me.

- What do you see as the benefits and/or challenges to having culturally and linguistically diverse students in your class?

During verbal discussions that critique student work, I have noticed that some students appear to feel uncomfortable addressing the class when English is not their first language. But when the students as a group are accepting and interested in the student's work, the class often helps that student express what they want to say, to everyone's benefit. As a result of seeing their peers supported, other reluctant students are often encouraged to persevere in their oral presentations and participate more in the discussions. This benefit extends to all students regardless of language background.

Another benefit of having diverse student backgrounds represented in classes is how projects can produce unexpected and interesting results that broaden the exposure of the class to other cultures and ideas. One example was a homework drawing by students produced after seeing the exhibition of paintings by Kehinde Wiley at the Brooklyn Museum. The students were asked to combine observational figure drawing and a decorative motif or background design of their choice. Several students incorporated personal designs, and some were specifically from their own culture, including a student who combined an Islamic design with a self-portrait, expanding the other students' knowledge when the homework was reviewed.

- How might the ideas about language, diversity, and cross-cultural communication discussed during the NEA workshops thus far contribute to your classroom practice?

The workshop discussions have helped me be more attuned to gaps in speaking to the class and their actual understanding, and this includes classes with both international and domestic students. Even when asked during the lecture if students have questions on a project, I realize a student may not have understood and yet was reluctant to raise their hand. So I now regularly ask students to come speak to me individually later if they do not understand something. I have noticed that doing so means I often get students coming up to me later, and in the case of international students I often realize that English is not their first language. Even though they clearly understand English, one-to-one they are more comfortable asking me to explain terms they do not understand.

Another thought I have had about classroom discussions is, in addition to oral dialogues, to include written responses, in which students can use the dictionary to build on their spoken vocabulary. This also gives me additional information to help assess class participation.

Part 2

Moving Theory into Practice: Diversity as Resource

- How might you change an existing lesson/assignment as a result of participating in the NEA project?

As a result of NEA participation, a drawing class homework that combined an art historical subject with a personal interpretation specifically raised ideas of diversity as one possible approach. One student chose to emulate Wayne Thiebaud's art that included paintings and drawings of popular food items, and specifically made use of food from the Caribbean as subject matter, something that created additional interest from the class in her work. Her follow up project was to portray musical instruments from her

culture. Another student based her drawing project on an approach that emphasized gender opposites, and explored realistic observational drawing of a male figure dressed in traditional female clothing.

- What new assignment might you develop that would incorporate lessons learned as a result of the Pathways to Globalization workshops?

One result of the workshops was to include an artist statement component for the homework drawing project and also to ask students to use the Writing Studio as a resource. This aspect was added ostensibly for support in the statement writing. But since we had access to a dedicated tutor who was briefed on the project, students were also asked to visit the Writing Studio at an earlier stage, and to include thoughts about how their ideas about art historical references and their personal approaches might be developed. In some cases, meeting with the tutor prompted more reflection by the student on how they could further develop or enhance their project.

At the last workshop we attended, we were informed that there may be the possibility that the Library will provide resources to help students research visual and art historical images for their class projects. This may provide an additional resource to augment a visual project or homework writing project, and include broader or richer content for students to be exposed to and make use of.

- When responding to and evaluating student writing and/or presentations, which assessment practices will best inform students' understanding of communicating across cultures?

As a result of this workshop participation, I came away with a reinforced idea that assessment practices should strive to evaluate the intent of the student's verbal communication, focusing as much as possible on content and meaning expressed. One aspect of teaching studio art is to ensure that students are exposed to and learn the specific vocabulary of visual art. Thus it is important to realize that students from different backgrounds — domestically as well as internationally — often have different educational and cultural backgrounds using language, as well as approaches to visual art and its specific vocabulary.

Asking everyone to say or write something about themselves during the first class — e.g., a short description of a student's background and experience, preparatory classes, and goals for the semester, often helps me assess each student's previous experience, including educational, cultural, and language backgrounds, and adjust how best to approach the class work.

There can be the inclusion of varied work reviews, some more formal and others more informal, such as reviewing sketchbooks or work-in-progress, as opposed to only reviewing finished work. These informal reviews can be helpful in getting students to feel more open in their more formal oral critique discussions.

I have also noticed students may have varied experiences with their access to examples of art history. While working with students from different backgrounds, it is especially important to include discussions that allow the opportunity for students to learn from each other. By being open to each student's personal interest in specific artists, styles, or cultures, the class as a whole is informed of different examples, not necessarily only those that I may bring up. Also, by treating each other with respect for their varied interests, students can feel more comfortable with NOT always knowing the answer or the best way to express their thoughts, as well benefiting from the specific knowledge that individual

students often bring to the discussion. Giving students the opportunity to speak about artists or historical periods they are interested in allows them to receive credit for their contribution to the class.

Another practice is to include a written component that can also be evaluated, as some students are better able to communicate their ideas in writing and others orally. For some review assignments, students may be allowed to choose between written or oral presentations. My thoughts about these practices are partly based on having ongoing written discussions take place in an online drawing class I teach. As a result of reading the written statements, I often notice that individual students with international backgrounds become more understandable over the semester. This may be the result of improvement in their writing of comments and replies over the semester, including the written dialogues between them, the other students, and myself. But it may also be the result of everyone getting used to their specific linguistic patterns in their discussion posts. In face-to-face classes, this also happens orally, as when speaking with students who use different syntax often makes me almost start talking in their syntax, for example, as I recently noticed with a current student who has a Russian background.

In addition to giving letter grade and written comments, I also make time for assessments of work to include one-on-one reviews to ensure students understand specific comments. This helps me to communicate my assessment and see that the student understands how best to improve, and also gives me separate information on how best to communicate with that student to help them improve going forward.

Part 3

Teaching Goals Statement

- Given the topics discussed in the NEA workshops and your own experiences teaching, please prepare a personal statement describing your teaching goals for the next few years

I think the main goal I would strive for in the context of this workshop is to find more ways to give all students every opportunity to learn, contribute, and receive credit for their work, i.e., to “level the playing field” as much as possible. Also, I will strive to allow the different student backgrounds to enrich the learning of everyone in the classroom. That means that lessons and assignments should both take into account the variety of educational, cultural, and language backgrounds of the students as well as give them opportunities to use their different abilities and backgrounds to learn the subject matter, as well as learn from each other.

One goal will be to review lessons to see if there are specific aspects that students are not getting, and if so, to try to figure why not. So if I notice that some students watching a power point presentation presented orally do not get all the information, I could decide to put a version of the lecture on a Blackboard page so it could be reviewed later, possibly helping those students.

Finding more ways to assess comprehension will be another goal. For example, including a self-assessment component as I have done in some class projects might be modified to include specific criteria based on the students in that class. Or if a project includes a written component that some students find challenging, I may give students more time and suggest they take advantage of access to resources such as the Writing Studio or the Library.