

ART EDUCATION

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Section 3: What Excellent Visual Arts Teaching Looks Like

What Excellent Visual Arts Teaching Looks Like: Balanced, Interdisciplinary, and Meaningful

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Interweavings: What Excellent Visual Arts Teaching Looks Like

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Visible Threads: Excellence in the Higher Education Classroom

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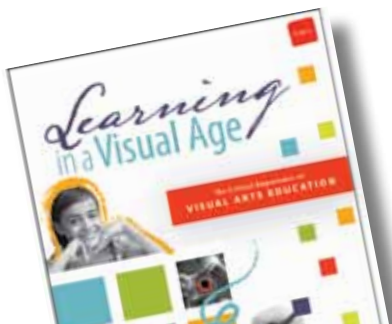
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What Excellent Visual Arts Teaching Looks Like: Balanced, Interdisciplinary, and Meaningful

Renee Sandell

“As a qualitative language, art explores how, in contrast to what is, by enabling people to meaningfully create and respond to images.”

Excellent visual arts teaching for 21st-century learners increasingly combines technology with artistic knowledge and skills—a combination that has already transformed the nature as well as nurture of contemporary visual arts education in and out of the public schools (NAEA, 2009). In today’s participatory culture, the preoccupation with acts of transformation (e.g., “makeovers” of bodies, fashion, and spaces), fascination with talent (e.g., in music, dance, and cooking), incessant demand for innovation, and habitual self-revelation through blogging and social networking combine to compel the need for greater clarity and access to creative expression and critical response. These often are expressed through divergent and convergent thinking abilities—interactive visual thinking skills that shape meanings in school and society. Today’s “screenagers,” who are rapidly becoming tomorrow’s citizens, progressively require capabilities to encode and decode meaning in response to society’s plethora of images, ideas, and media of the past, as well as contemporary elements of our increasingly complex visual world. This section explores how balanced, interdisciplinary, and meaningful pedagogical approaches contribute to excellent visual arts teaching that fosters development of visual literacy needed by all learners from “cradle to grave.”



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Examine evidence for the capacities that art education develops in students and what it can prepare them to do in *Learning in a Visual Age*.

In developing visually literate citizens with visual arts knowledge, skills, and habits of mind, excellent visual arts teaching must engage all learners with art in a myriad of forms, ideas, and purposes. As a qualitative language, art explores *how*, in contrast to *what is*, by enabling people to meaningfully create and respond to images.

Excellent visual arts teaching helps learners navigate through our visual world using two qualitative and interlinked experiential processes: creative expression and critical response. Through the *transformative* process of **creative expression**, visual learners generate artistic ideas that can be elaborated, refined, and finally shaped into meaningful visual images and structures. Through the *informative* process of **critical response**, visual learners perceive, interpret, and finally judge ideas connected to visual imagery and structures both past and present. Fully engaging students with these processes occurs through three interactive “studio thinking” structures: demonstration-lecture, students-at-work, and critique (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007). Informed by research, excellent visual arts teaching cultivates eight studio habits of mind that help individuals learn: develop craft, engage and persist, envision, express, observe, reflect, stretch and explore, and understand the art world. These habits of mind develop essential 21st-century literacy and life skills in all students.

Excellent Visual Arts Teaching is Balanced

In contrast to stereotypical “make and take” school art projects, art is a vital and core subject that should be seen as balanced, interdisciplinary, and grounded in meaning and inspiration. Furthermore, traditional overemphasis on formal qualities (in terms of studio materials, as well as art elements or design principles) is insufficient in a digital global world where social and other forms of communicative media are prevalent in daily life.

By using a balanced approach to studying form, theme, and context of an artwork, learners can create as well as discern layers of meaning in visual language, as revealed in the following equation: Form+Theme+Context (FTC) = Art (Sandell, 2006, 2009). In exploring **form**, or *how the work “is,”* learners differentiate an artist’s many structural decisions, embedded in the creative process, that lead to a final product. By examining **theme**, or *what the work is about*, learners explore what the artist expresses through a selected

overarching concept or “Big Idea” (Walker, 2001) that reveals the artist’s expressive viewpoint relating art to life as well as other disciplines. In investigating **context(s)**, or *when, where, by/for whom, and why the art was created (and valued)*, learners comprehend the authentic nature of artwork by probing the conditions for and under which the art was created from our contemporary perspective, as well as those of foreign and previous cultures.

“Teachers and others can use FTC palettes to encode and decode a variety of phenomena...”

With contextual information, learners can perceive the intention and purpose of the artwork. Their abilities to explore, interpret, and evaluate art is enhanced by identifying the personal, social, cultural, historical, artistic, educational, political, spiritual, and other contexts that influence creation and understanding of an artwork. As learners distinguish how the form and theme work together within specific contexts, they see how a balance of qualities shapes layers of meaning, revealing the artwork’s nature as well as its significance and relevance. Learners’ insights, assessments, and questions resulting from balanced FTC exploration can lead to deeper engagement, understanding, and appreciation of art and its relationship to other areas of study—and life itself.

Balanced FTC methodology may be made visually accessible through the FTC palette, a graphic organizer that contains both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary criteria to deepen learner engagement and connections (see figure 1). Learners can use this tool with any work of art, such as a painting, to uncover visual evidence through observed formal qualities (e.g., line, color, composition, scale, style), explore relationships embedded in thematic qualities (e.g., big ideas represented and connected to other artworks, art forms, and subject areas), and discern various types of significance and relevance rooted in contextual qualities (e.g., historical period, circumstances, force, and value). Designed to activate divergent and convergent thinking by generating and “mixing” information, the FTC palette helps learners make interdisciplinary connections while inspiring open-ended and deeper inquiry. Teachers and others can use FTC palettes to encode and decode a variety of phenomena, including literature and music along with art lessons, museums, and

Form + Theme + Context... FTC Palette for Decoding and Encoding Visual Art

ART =	FORM <i>How the work "is"</i>	+	THEME <i>What the work is about</i>	+	CONTEXT <i>When, where, by/for whom and WHY the work was created/valued</i>
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Title: _____

How does a balance of formal, thematic, and contextual qualities **SHAPE** layers of meaning?

FORMAL	+	THEMATIC	+	CONTEXTUAL
<p>Actual Composition:</p> <p>Art Elements (line, shape, color, texture, value, space);</p> <p>Design Principles (emphasis, balance, harmony, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, unity):</p> <p>2D&3D Qualities:</p> <p>Size/Scale:</p> <p>Media/ Materials:</p> <p>Processes/Methods:</p> <p>Skills:</p> <p>Style:</p> <p>Other:</p>		<p>Broad Subject/BIG IDEA:</p> <p>Subject Matter:</p> <p>Point of View:</p> <p>Visual Sources:</p> <p>Art Historical References:</p> <p>Literary Sources:</p> <p>Other Arts Connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🎵 Music 🎭 Theater 💃 Dance 🎬 Film & New Media <p>Other Subject Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Math ⇒ Language Arts ⇒ Science ⇒ Social Studies ⇒ Physical Education ⇒ Vocational Education 		<p>WHEN:</p> <p>WHERE:</p> <p>BY/FOR WHOM:</p> <p>WHY: Intention/Purpose(s):</p> <p>Significance/Relevance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Personal ◆ Social ◆ Cultural ◆ Historical ◆ Artistic ◆ Educational ◆ Political ◆ Spiritual ◆ Other

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<http://naea.digication.com/FTC/Home//>

FTC Insights, Assessments and Questions:

Figure 1: Form+Theme+Context: FTC Palette for Encoding and Decoding Visual Art.
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other matter to discern meaning by equally rebalancing formal structures with thematic relationships and significant/relevant contexts.

Excellent Visual Arts Teaching is Interdisciplinary

A balanced approach to FTC reveals art's interdisciplinary nature that correlates with the sciences and humanities, among other disciplines, connecting to life past and present. While the teaching of art in the schools traditionally has been limited in terms of instructional time and curricular emphasis, this qualitative language has natural and vital linkages with all school disciplines. According to John Goldonowicz (1985):

Like French or Spanish, art is a language that can be learned and understood.

It is a form of communication that one can learn to read and speak through study and practice. Reading art means understanding a visual statement.

Speaking art means creating a visual statement. When art seems strange or meaningless, it is only that this language is yet to be understood. (p. 17)

Drawing multiple connections between art and other subjects to include English, science, mathematics, physical education, social studies, music, and religion, Goldonowicz concludes that "art can communicate that which is universal and that for which there are no words" (p. 17).

When "read" in terms of multiple connections between their forms, themes, and contexts, artworks easily relate to other disciplines of study such as history, science, and language arts. For example, the *Bayeux Tapestry* is a visual historical document; its narrative of the Battle of Hastings in 1066 depicts the events leading up to the Norman conquest of England, as well as the events of the invasion itself. The *Bayeux Tapestry* is an embroidered cloth—not an actual tapestry woven on a vertical loom—measuring 1.6 feet by 224.3 feet. Annotated in Latin, the needlework narrative also has recorded scientific significance: It includes a representation of Halley's Comet, which is seen from Earth at 75-year intervals, as a strange star at which the people gaze in fear. Similar artworks can enlarge learners' exploration of fiber artworks from diverse historical periods and cultures. Examples include Hmong story cloths; Huicholl yarn paintings; Mola appliqués; Asante Adrinka cloth; Amish quilts; Miriam Schapiro's *femme* paintings;

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates Project* in New York City's Central Park; the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, the largest ongoing community arts project in the world; and designed fashion creations on *Project Runway* and other television programs.

In *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*, Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2010) observes of the arts: "central to becoming an educated person is the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility and the capacity to give form to ideas and emotions" (p. 55). This observation points to the need to reexamine the arts and its relationship to traditional school disciplines. Excellent visual arts teaching helps learners make interdisciplinary connections between art and life, while developing visual-communication skills leading to authenticity and multiple forms of literacy that will facilitate community interaction and global understanding.

Excellent Visual Arts Teaching is Meaningful

Focusing on the exploration of art's meaning as derived from a balanced and interdisciplinary FTC approach, excellent visual arts teaching draws on art's sensory nature to inspire individual enlightenment while building community. Nurturing Daniel Pink's (2005) six new senses of *design, story, symphony, empathy, play, and meaning* for a 21st-century "whole new mind," excellent art teaching helps learners develop visual literacy, defined as "the ability to interpret, use, appreciate, and create images and video using both conventional and 21st-century media in ways that advance thinking, decision making, communication, and learning" (Visual Literacy, 2005). Delving deeper into the nature and pedagogical benefits of these six senses, a learner who demonstrates a cultivated sense of...

Design... can create and appreciate human-made objects that go beyond function and may be perceived as beautiful, whimsical, extraordinary, unique, and/or emotionally engaging;

Excellent visual arts teaching helps learners to work with a range of materials, decipher orientation and place in the world, make visual choices ranging from tattoo images and their body placement to the selection and organization of spaces, objects, and materials.

Story... communicates effectively with others by creating as well as appreciating a compelling narrative;

Excellent visual arts teaching helps a learners develop an awareness of history and culture, understand text and subtext in the news and media, gain insight into plot and subplot as well as conflict and resolution, exchange ideas with enhanced interaction and transparency for clearer connection.

Symphony... synthesizes ideas, sees the big picture, crosses boundaries, and combines disparate pieces into a meaningful whole;

Excellent visual arts teaching helps learners build deeper understandings and relate learning in and out of school, perceive one's self as an evolving life learner, able to discern the meaning of "friendship" from social media, and grasp relationships among conflicting ideologies.

Empathy... understands another's point of view, is able to forge relationships and feels compassion for others;

Excellent visual arts teaching helps build tolerance and foster kindness, consideration, and caring while reversing cyber- and other forms of bullying, gossip and antipathy.

Play... creatively engages in problem-solving, benefits personally and socially from flexibility, humor, risk-taking, curiosity, inventive thinking, and games;

Excellent visual arts teaching helps make learning fun, collaborative, experimental, and assists learners in taking risks, lightening up from self-criticism, and taking oneself too seriously.

Meaning... pursues more significant endeavors, desires, and enduring ideas, has a sense of purpose, inspiration, fulfillment, and responsibility in making informed choices toward higher-order thinking skills and transformation;

Excellent visual arts teaching underscores the value of learning experiences, builds pride in contributions given and received, fosters responsibility (vs. cheating) and respect for teachers and parents invested in the development of every student, developing into an accountable citizen of the world. (NAEA, n. d., p. 2)

Excellent visual arts teaching is balanced, interdisciplinary, and meaningful; as a result, every art lesson can be viewed as a work of art on its own. Through art lessons that are designed to help learners fully visualize—creatively express and critically respond—at each developmental level, excellent art teaching can readily enhance all six senses in a single lesson. This results not only in the creation of hundreds of uniquely expressive artworks, but also the ability to make informed judgments leading to sensitivity, understanding, and appreciation by future citizens in our visual age.

Mindful of technology's prevailing role, constant evolution, and worldwide impact, art education's 21st-century emphasis on visual thinking for literacy looks remarkably different from its 20th-century focus on art products and their display. Excellent visual arts teaching holds a crucial and central place in the curriculum in cultivating human potential both today and tomorrow: It directly engages all learners in perceiving our increasingly visual world to discover "*so much MORE than what you see...*" (www.arteducators.org/advocacy). The nature of that discovery transfers readily to other school subjects and qualitative life experience locally and around the globe.

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Interweavings: What Excellent Visual Arts Teaching Looks Like

Judith M. Burton

“The hallmark of outstanding teachers resides in the flexibility with which they interweave the many demands of their teaching lives, and how they embrace the diverse and often divergent learning needs of their pupils.”

Outstanding elementary, middle, and high school art teachers network their knowledge of art, students, school culture, and settings into rich repertoires of instructional action. These teachers frame their work within “ecological” views of their art classrooms, in which interrelationships among psychological, social, aesthetic, and pedagogical judgments form complex-coherent and contextually nuanced patterns of behavior. Exemplary art educators understand that the visual arts constitute *important ways of knowing and learning for all children and adolescents*, for they are among the primary languages through which personal and cultural meaning are constructed and find echoes within each other.

The hallmark of outstanding teachers resides in the flexibility with which they interweave the many demands of their teaching lives, and how they embrace the diverse and often divergent learning needs of their pupils. In sharp contrast to the prevailing emphasis on identifying menus of singular qualities thought to exemplify outstanding teachers, this White Paper captures the dynamic interweaving of insights, skills, and personal qualities that research studies suggest characterize excellence in an age that increasingly calls for reflective-critical visual skills.

Response Repertoires: Occurrences in Classrooms

To the informed observer, art classrooms are special spaces in which timing and movement become important facilitators of personal and shared learning (Burton & Hafeli, in press). Effective teachers do not hurry youngsters to settle down

and pay attention immediately; they wait for pupils' natural rhythms to reset themselves from prior classrooms, like eyes moving suddenly from dark into light and needing time to adjust. Teachers move as if partners in a larger rhythmic choreography whose repertoires include sitting close, standing back, leaning in, turning round, looking but not speaking, pausing to comment briefly or at length, touching and confirming; they seem to be everywhere at once, at least in a tacit sense (Burton & Hafeli, in press). Teachers who are literally and figuratively present to their pupils at all times (regardless of whether that presence is acknowledged explicitly) create an ambiance of overall cohesion, trust, and availability.

The choreography of movement within the art classroom is critical to important learning that would not happen otherwise. Teachers who acknowledge pupil rhythms allow time for them to stop by each other's work to engage in dialoging, receiving and taking, sharing and confirming, and explaining ideas and new techniques (Burton & Hafeli, in press). Facilitating a practice of shared classroom give-and-take enables youngsters to act like artists in their studios who seek moments of inspiration away from their canvases by thumbing through well-used books, exploring digital resources, or examining the work of peers. All children are born image-makers and image enjoyers, and they need to enrich the horizons of their own visual resources through thoughtful interactions with others.

By exercising the freedom of personal investigation and inquiry, youngsters at different developmental levels take hold of their own learning, discovering how to learn from each other's experiences as well as from their teachers. In this way, they also act autonomously within the group while still being part of the larger whole. Within the social and psychological interactions that characterize the classrooms of outstanding teachers, children acknowledge the difference between learning from the teacher and from each other, knowing what is possible from whom, and moving seamlessly and with little trouble from one to the other (Burton, 2004).

Multiple Outcomes: Learning and Imagination

Within the rhythmic flow of the art classroom, outstanding teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn while acknowledging that there are as many routes to that knowledge as pupils in their classes. Objectives are

framed in terms of deep and focused learning that call for critical reflection, investigation, invention, and personal generativity. Within the framework of their instructional orientations, teachers move back-and-forth, inspiring learning at ever greater depth. They integrate concerns with materials, artistic-aesthetic concepts, and techniques, while pacing their responses to the experiential lives, perspectives, and questions of their pupils (Burton, in press). In this way, they call into play the intricate imaginative and mind-expanding capacities of young people in the service of constructing and expressing personal meaning in visual form.

In the world of outstanding teachers, learning is clearly framed; it builds in complexity and nuance in the context of dialogues in which pupils are invited to reflect on their personal associations by sharing experiences, taking imaginative leaps, and developing critical reflection. While individual teachers have their own presentational styles, challenging dialogues tend to range across different functions. Questions are posed to problematize assumptions, to solicit direct answers; at other times, dialogues provoke reflection and imagination and consideration of concepts, feelings, ideas, and actions. At times, dialogues are calibrated to the specifics of an individual's needs or experiences and sometimes to the interests of a group. Experienced teachers are adroit at juggling a variety of responses, and are able to push forward the learning at hand while transcending boundaries and extending possibilities (Barrett, 2003; Barbules, 1993). Dialogues inspire complex mental processes that invite listening and negotiating within the flow of different and diverse kinds of classroom interactions. Dialogues shape a common language, providing a forum for children and teachers to find new ways of talking about the practice of art. Handled well, dialogues carry learning beyond the determinants of verbal language, and project naturally into the kind of thoughtful engagements with materials that underpin the creation of informed visual images.

The pattern of challenges to reflection, thought, and imagination offered by outstanding teachers, along with the open-ended sharing of pupils' artistic responses, shape individual contexts of learning over time (Green, 1995). Rather than direct their pupils toward prescribed or *a priori* outcomes, effective teachers foster individual interpretations

while opening these to critical contemplation among the group (Dewey, 1934/1980; Hargreaves, 1994). This kind of exemplary teaching proceeds with rigor, inviting reflection in the exploration and sharing of ideas, and care and invention in using materials; it calls forth a kind of pride in working toward personal outcomes and assuming thoughtful responses toward others.

Ecological Awareness: Continuous Assessment

As lessons progress, teachers make reflective decisions about learning within the flow of life in the art classroom. Teachers interplay responses to individuals and responses to the group, remaining mindful of the impact of the one upon the other (Jackson, 1986, 1990). They respond to or initiate dialogue with individual pupils, sometimes drawing in others for discussion along the way. At other times, they enter a dialogue in progress, acting in give-and-take partnership.

In general, outstanding teachers do not think they need to engage directly with each child in every lesson, nor do they think they have to intercede in every group discussion. Rather, their presence alone creates an encompassing freedom that inspires curiosity and responds to individual children's need to be recognized and ask questions (Burton, in press). Outstanding teachers intercede or stand back as they read the initiating cues offered by pupils, often responding to issues that are tacitly (rather than explicitly) expressed. They ask questions relating to specific pieces of work and inspire reflection on problems and dilemmas, seemingly without guiding pupils to specific outcomes or telling them what to do or think (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In the pedagogical practices of outstanding teachers, such abilities come not only from prior experiences in classrooms, but also from a combination of explicit knowledge of individuals interwoven with insights about artistic-aesthetic and social development. Together, these responses frame how teachers enter into discourse with their pupils and provide a springboard for ongoing assessment, diagnosing the need for help or the readiness for new and more-demanding challenges to reflection, perception, imagination, and decision making.

Dynamically Inflected Subject Matter

Outstanding teachers draw upon internalized repertoires of insights about art and art practice from which they distill the right nuance, clue, idea, fact, thought, or possibility

to nurture or challenge individual learning. Responses to individual pupils' meaning-making needs, while framed by lesson objectives, draw upon teachers' reflective ability to take multiple perspectives on their *own* artistic-aesthetic knowledge and re-appraise it in relation to different problems and questions posed by their pupils (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994). Teachers accomplish this in ways that identify the need for specific knowledge or facts while calling into play pupils' imaginations, leaving them free to establish their own personal objectives and interpretations within the framework of the lessons. Outstanding teachers are able to analyze the problem-oriented needs of their pupils and do this time and again, within the hurly-burly of art classroom life, in a profoundly moving way.

Art classrooms can be unpredictable places; teachers respond to surprises and unexpected occurrences by folding them into the general pattern of learning. The flexibility with which teachers accommodate the unexpected is parallel to their ability to transcend the boundaries of their own artistic knowledge, extending it in new directions that blur assumptions, divisions, and conventions. Perhaps this embodies the "art" of teaching in that, within the flexibility afforded to pupils in managing their own learning, teachers themselves embrace new insights during the flow of the lesson and are open to sharing new possibilities in the knowledge that, in doing so, their pupils will add nuances and interpretations the teachers have never considered (Gardner, 1991).

Decision-Making in Action

While outstanding teachers are uniquely able to make many diverse decisions within the ongoing flow of classroom life, what is profoundly moving is how they take the time to listen, hear, observe, and shape their understanding in response to the ideas and responses of their pupils. There is a kind of circular reaction here; as teachers shape these understandings, so they become lenses through which to reflect on their own artistic knowledge, and distill from it the insights or skills which they anticipate will best support their pupils' needs. In other words, they scan their own knowledge from the various perspectives and needs of individual pupils. The ways in which teachers interweave their own development and that of their pupils include an ethic of care and commitment of purpose that regulate classroom life and

« [teachers] become lenses through which to reflect on their own artistic knowledge... »

pupil-learning more fully than the imposition of external rules and exercise of power relationships (Burton & Hafeli, in press).

Conclusion

Studies to date suggest a high level of consensus about what makes for outstanding practitioners. The essential question is, then, what can we learn from exemplary teachers to help prepare *all* teachers to enter contemporary classrooms and art studios? The response repertoires identified here, within which and out of which experienced teachers shape and distill their ideas and hone their practice, offer suggestive starting points. It seems that the mastery of knowledge and honing of skills for exemplary practice are underpinned by three critical requirements:

- The reflective ability to envision artistic-aesthetic knowledge from multiple vantage points, and to move dynamically within and beyond a personal knowledge base.
- A rich and diverse understanding of the needs, interests, and cognitive capacities of learners, and an openness to listen, hear, and plan in response to the various sources and starting points that energize their thoughts and ideas.
- The imagination and flexibility to interweave personal content knowledge with insights about pupils, and offer appropriate and rigorous actions and skills that take learning beyond the here and now.

It is, perhaps, most important to help future practitioners, parents, and concerned citizens understand that the experiences that form exemplary art teachers' repertoires will ultimately be grounded in, and become a function of, the broader ecological educational environments in which they find themselves (Eisner, 1998). Therefore, a task for future research is to identify what sustains the formation of teachers' individual repertoires, and what impedes their growth, within the reality of everyday art classrooms and schools. A more subtle and nuanced understanding of the work of art teachers in their environments will have direct impact on the quality and relevance of arts-based learning to the development of young minds.

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Visible Threads: Excellence in the Higher Education Classroom

Lynn Beudert

“...higher education faculty members and the future visual arts educators they teach imagine, contemplate, and interconnect theoretical, practical, relevant, and ethical aspects of meaningful visual arts content.”

Higher education visual arts classrooms—specifically those that prepare future visual arts educators for careers in school, museum, and/or community-based environments—are vital and powerful representations of what excellent visual arts teaching looks like as we contemplate the nature of Learning in a Visual Age (NAEA, 2010).

University and college classrooms serve as the crossroads at which preservice undergraduate and graduate students envision, research, reflect upon, and assume the role of the visual arts teacher. Within these spaces and places, higher education faculty members and the future visual arts educators they teach imagine, contemplate, and interconnect theoretical, practical, relevant, and ethical aspects of meaningful visual arts content. They also realize subsequent transformation and implementation as accessible and innovative curricula and pedagogy that contribute to the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual development of children and youth (Eisner, 2002).

Learning within the preservice visual arts higher education classroom is facilitated by faculty members who hold advanced degrees in the visual arts and education (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004), and are cognizant of and able to model the professional knowledge, versatility, and dispositions delineated as standards for preparing today’s visual arts teachers (NAEA, 2009). Faculty members are willing learners and scholars of practice; vigorous supporters for visual arts

education within their communities; and dedicated mentors committed to selecting and preparing quality professional educators who ultimately view teaching as their life’s work and moral purpose. Moreover, faculty intentionally select and prepare future visual arts educators with the following professional qualities:

- *Experienced* in using diverse media and technology;
- *Knowledgeable* about diverse cultures and art forms;
- *Dedicated* to making the visual arts accessible and promoting visual literacy;
- *Prepared* to nurture students’ talents and abilities;
- *Essential* in captivating students as they respond to the visual arts and visual culture;
- *Skilled* at engaging students with various learning styles;
- *Sensitive* to students’ needs and interests;
- *Adept* at assessing learners;
- *Reflective* as they examine the current literature and best practices;
- *Committed* to their ongoing professional development;
- *Are advocates* for visual arts education; and
- *Involved* in the National Art Education Association and other arts education organizations.¹

Within excellent programs, a faculty member’s approaches to visual arts teaching are diverse, yet philosophically aligned with one another and with current thinking concerning best practices informed by research in the field. Within these programs, preservice visual arts educators and alumni express their appreciation for the tangible level of support for visual arts education that exists within both the higher education classroom and the community at large. Faculty members establish long-standing relationships not only with well-qualified and credentialed mentor/cooperating practicing teachers, but also with museum and community-based educators who guide preservice teachers as they participate in student teaching, various field experiences, and internships within traditional and alternative visual arts educational environments. Learning within the preservice higher education classroom is complemented and enriched by the expertise and skills of these practitioners. They not only provide supportive environments for preservice educators to interact with learners, take risks, and foster

¹Adapted from art teacher qualities compiled by Renee Sandell for NAEA’s advocacy bookmark, “A Visual Arts Educator is...” (2004).

pedagogical relationships, but they are also receptive to new ideas introduced by student-teachers and internees, as well as to calls for change when advocated within the profession.

What, then, are some of the characteristics—visible threads—of excellent visual arts teaching in the higher education classroom? How is the richness of faculty members' and preservice teachers' work imagined and shared within this setting and consequently made *visible* through appropriate theoretical and practical avenues? Selected qualitative characteristics with examples are briefly highlighted in this section.

Envisioning, Decision-Making, and Questioning Assumptions

Excellence in teaching the visual arts requires making intentional decisions and professional judgments about the nature of visual arts content and ways in which it will be pedagogically transformed within accessible and inclusive educational environments. Those environments are considerate, for example, of the gender identities, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, and learning and physical abilities of diverse multi-aged learners. The higher education classroom provides an analytical, yet positive and non-threatening environment in which future visual arts teachers envision, recognize, and evaluate the pedagogical components of teaching and learning situations.

As an example, University of Arizona faculty member Marissa McClure directs a Saturday morning laboratory school in which future teachers work in collaborative teams that design and teach curriculum units for urban K-12 children and youth. Yet before the school opens its doors each semester, future teachers, as architects and planners, jointly envision and build the school from the ground up. With the school's philosophy and mission in mind, they advertise the program, work with parents and guardians, write grants for securing student scholarships, as well as anticipate and make numerous complex professional curricular and pedagogical decisions *before* and during the school session.

In excellent visual arts education classrooms, future visual arts teachers are asked to suspend their beliefs and question their assumptions not only about the nature of visual arts teaching, but also about the diverse populations they aspire

to teach. Like many faculty educators across the nation, Kimberly Cosier (2006) ensures that preservice teachers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee recognize that excellent visual arts teaching is about understanding and accepting difference in peoples, as well as taking action in terms of promoting social justice and fairness within their future classrooms. During early field experiences in Milwaukee's urban schools, preservice teachers discover that, "regardless of race, social class or any other factor, kids care, and that they need caring, curious, and knowledgeable teachers" (Cosier, cited in Beudert, 2008, p. 68). Within excellent visual arts teaching, pedagogical relationships are visibly reciprocal and humanely constructed.

Entrusting, Modeling, and Sharing Pedagogical Expertise

Excellence in teaching within the age of visual learning requires that future visual arts educators have a robust background in contemporary visual art content. This background, however, becomes diminished unless preservice teachers are entrusted with conveying and sharing what they know as inspired and practiced pedagogues *and* learners.

Mindful of their experiences in higher education classes and through collaborations with students and practitioners in field experiences, future teachers model, deconstruct, and reflect upon contemporary art content and instructional practices that will engage learners in intellectual and creative inquiry. Preservice teachers within the higher education classroom at the University of British Columbia, for example, analyze a variety of instructional approaches that are modeled for them by faculty member Kit Grauer (Beudert, 2008). These future teachers make critical and informed professional judgments about the appropriateness of various pedagogical methods for the transmission of authentic and meaningful visual arts content. The articulation and demonstration of instructional possibilities implicit within visual arts education allow future teachers to recognize that their chosen individual pedagogies are central to successful classroom learning.

Professional Reflexivity, Identity, and Growth

Excellent visual arts teaching requires that future teachers are able to make thoughtful intelligent and practical decisions in complex and dynamic teaching situations. Given the experiential, evolving, and changeable dimensions of teaching, excellence in visual arts teaching also requires that future teachers reflect upon their teaching decisions, choices, and actions.

“As scholars of their own consciousness, prospective visual arts educators reflect upon their teaching experiences as a means of contributing to their professional growth...”

As scholars of their own consciousness, prospective visual arts educators reflect upon their teaching experiences as a means of contributing to their professional growth and taking ownership of their instructional decisions. As reflective practitioners, they are able to comprehend and contemplate implications of their teaching—implications that often linger within their students at the end of the teaching day. For example, firsthand experiences garnered through a variety of means (by participating in school field experiences, a curriculum course, student-teaching, a community-arts education internship, or within a university or college laboratory school) are linked to research, case studies of teaching, and readings from the literature. In this way, preservice teachers do not ground their professional identities solely in their own personal experiences and past associations with schooling.

Excellent visual arts teaching also requires that prospective teachers think deeply about their own selves as persons and professionals as they make the transition from preservice student to actual teacher. They are able to understand *why* they aspire to become visual arts educators and so educate others in the visual arts, particularly given the emotional, moral, and political purposes that underlie teaching as a profession. Excellent preservice visual arts teachers develop and maintain realistic, ethical, positive, and hopeful aspirations, as they focus on becoming caring, empathetic, and joyful life teachers (Nieto, 2007) within diverse and receptive educational communities.

Valuing the Communities in Which Visual Arts Educators Work and Learn

Excellence in visual arts teaching requires that potential visual arts educators compose their own professional and pedagogical lives as future teachers with personal dignity and a respect for all persons. As future teachers, they acknowledge that they will be deeply influenced by and dependent upon pedagogical, collegial, and institutional relationships with others within the profession. An understanding of the practices of professional colleagues helps foster potential

connections with and allegiances between others engaged in thoughtful curricular and pedagogical practices that lie within and outside discipline of the visual arts. In excellent higher education classrooms, preservice educators are exposed to a myriad of professional experiences that range, for example, from developing partnerships and fostering collaborations with local schools, museums, and parent-teacher associations to cementing joint ventures with local community organizations.

For instance, future teachers at Georgia State University participate in providing instruction for children and youth in urban non-traditional education settings, such as local refugee shelters and alternative after-school programs (Milbrandt, 2006). These teachers implement authentic academic, technical, and practical content within alternative contemporary societal and cultural institutions, as well as develop the traits of “efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship, consciousness, and interdependence” (Milbrandt, 2006, p. 18) that are required of excellent teachers. Likewise, preservice undergraduate and graduate teachers at the University of Arizona tackle theoretical and practical issues related to developing grassroots partnerships with local community organizations (McClure, 2010), which in turn enable them to acknowledge that undertaking collaborative educational projects requires patience, adaptability, compromise, and the ability to hear and respond to the voices of others.

Experiences like these allow future teachers to comprehend the multi-dimensional, collaborative roles that visual arts educators undertake and forge. Thus, future educators jointly share and experience the successes, the nuances, the ups and downs, *and* the pedagogical challenges and negotiations integral to the nitty-gritty of daily life within a range of visual arts education settings for children and youth.

Rather than merely regarding themselves as an elementary or secondary visual arts teacher, a museum educator, a community arts educator, or the like, prospective arts educators distinguish how excellent teaching is represented in visual arts educational venues, within *and* outside those in which they desire to work and teach. With these insights in hand, they advocate for visual arts education programs, students, and colleagues, as well as visibly shape the rich fiber of what excellent visual arts education looks like within the profession *and* within this dynamically evolving visual age.

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