



PIMC Conference
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Those Who Can, Do; Those Who Can Do More, Teach

Robert Dancik

Three handouts about being a good teacher, a good student, and a creative thinker.

Some Musings About Teaching

Below are some thoughts about teaching. Because a teacher needs students in order to be a teacher, many of these musings concern the student side of the equation. These musings are in no particular order nor is there a hierarchy inherent or implied. They are not meant as instructions or answers or even advice. Rather, most come from firsthand observations and time spent in pursuit of some personal understanding of what happens when knowledge is exchanged between people.

- Classes are about students, not about teachers.
- Knowing more stuff doesn't equate to being a good teacher.
- Smile.
- Different isn't good or bad, it is simply different.
- Have an idea of what you want to your students to leave with before you begin
- Listen.
- There is a difference between what students need and what they want.
- Some knowledge is attainable only by spending more days on the planet.
- For a teacher, "I don't know" can be an answer.
- Try to separate your class from the outside world right from the start.
- When possible, greet your students at the door, but wherever it has to be, greet them.
- If you are asking for right brain thinking, you need to provide the shift from the left side.
- Academic degrees do not necessarily equate to intelligence.
- There are distinctly different styles of learning and it is the responsibility of the teacher to address as many as possible.
- Students want teachers, not friends.
- Students and teachers are people before they are students and teachers.
- We all know a lot.
- Age does not equal intelligence.
- Repeating doesn't ensure understanding for the teacher or the student.
- People often need "permission" to be creative.
- There's a difference between talking to a class/person/group and talking with them.
- Props can be really helpful.
- Your tone as a teacher can often set the tone of the class.
- Excitement is contagious.
- In a math class, success is everyone getting to the solution for any given "problem" (think of that term!). In an art class, success is everyone getting to his or her solution of a project.

If you have questions, concerns, or suggestions to expand these lists, please ring me at 914-629-1313 or email me at playcik@yahoo.com.

Filling in the Blank: or How I Learned to Embrace the Void

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The following is a list of possible antidotes for the blank canvas syndrome we all seem to face from time to time. They can be helpful to offer to students at various times and can also be expanded as lessons when teaching in an extended situation (weekly classes over a over a long time period). They can be thought of and perhaps used in a number of different ways. They could represent beginnings, sparks, nudges, incentives, provocations, windows, open pits, entrances, obstacles, rewards, or just about any other descriptor. What is important to keep in mind is that they may or may not yield a finished product, but if you employ any of them, the chances are better than even that you will be in a different place than you were before, and you will have begun to pull at least one foot out of that mire we call a “block.”

If, upon reading them, you find yourself thinking, “Huh, that’s just plain silly (or stupid, pointless, ridiculous, waste of time, etc.)” then you are on the right track. It means your left-brain is getting turned off and it will yield the controls to your right side where much of the creative muscle resides (of course those of you who are left handed already have a leg-up on this... would that be your right or left leg?). That sort of assessment of an endeavor may also signal that your critic is rising and if you pursue such a “silly” course then the critic may also leave, considering such action not worthy of his time.

Please take these in the spirit they were proffered – as possibilities for serious play – which for me is open-ended exploration. They are in no particular order and there is no hierarchy implied or intended.

- Use 5 (3, 17, 6) pieces of previously discarded work to make a single new piece.
- Give yourself a 20 minute limit to make a piece.
- Close or cover one eye and make a piece.
- Make 2 pieces in 2 hours working on them at the same time – don’t finish one then start the next.
- Visit the pet isle (or any other isle) in a grocery store and buy three items from which you make a piece.
- Go to a store you may never visit and proceed as above.
- Go to a department store (sports store, auto parts place, etc.) and buy three items under a dollar and make a piece from them.
- Look at the above pieces and replicate them in polymer clay, wood, metal clay, tar, hair, etc.
- Make 5 pieces in 5 days but never spend more than an hour on any one piece.
- Change where you work – physically, a different location.
- Use a process on your material that shouldn’t be used (hammer clay, overheat metal, etc.)
- Try adapting techniques from other materials to your material (e.g. metal clay canes)
- Find a partner to work with (this can be from afar) and...
 - ... Exchange unfinished pieces and finish for each other
 - ... Give each other assignments
 - ... Have competitions
 - ... Swap unfinished pieces, add an element and swap again – do this 4 times
 - ... Name each others pieces
- Flip the page over and list 1,462 other possibilities to get your students (or possibly yourself) past a creative block.

Creating an Emotional Alphabet

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The scene: you have just received an invitation to a show at one of the most prestigious galleries you know. The list of other artists is impressive (and intimidating) and you are flattered and excited to have a chance to exhibit with this group. As you read, you arrive at the section that includes the theme of the show and it states: “the show will focus on work depicting each artist’s reaction to the industrial plundering of the environment.” “My reaction to...” you mean they want me to make a piece about how I feel about it not just what I think about it. You know you feel strongly about the subject: that the constant disregard for the land and sea makes you angry, sad, and worried. But now, you need to figure a way of getting those feelings into a piece of work.

My suggestion is to compile an emotional alphabet that you can use as a resource to start the composition of your work. So, how do you create that alphabet?

The goal is to get down on paper a personal set of basic marks and symbols that relate to the various emotions you regularly feel. These may run the entire gamut from the happiest to the saddest, the most buoyant to the heaviest.

To start creating your alphabet, try the following.

- Watch a TV program (listen to a piece of music, go to a part of the museum) that you really don’t like — I mean reallllly don’t like — and start to make marks on a piece of paper. Don’t look, just have the paper and make marks. Pen, pencil, marker, charcoal, it doesn’t matter. Try different materials to see what effect this may have. Keep turning the page and mark without editing, forethought, or purpose.
- Along with mark-making, doodle. Draw pictures, characters, body parts, whatever comes into your mind. These are the images and marks informed by that stimulus.
- Do the same as above for stimuli that you like, that make you sad, joyous, ebullient, etc. These marks, drawings, and symbols become your emotional alphabet.