



The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers
in higher education

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Examples from Australian universities

Research Infused Teaching in a First Year Sculpture Course

Dr Marie Sierra
The University of Melbourne

Broad discipline area:

Creative Arts

- Fine Art: Sculpture and Spatial Practice

Year level:

- First year undergraduate

TRN strategy:

- Teach research methods, skills and techniques explicitly within subjects
- Infuse teaching with the values of researchers

Teaching and learning context:

- Research laboratory work
- Oral/research presentations
- Curriculum design
- Life long learning

Brief description of the initiative:

While there are technical skills that need to be developed in particular forms of Art, this academic is adamant that students are also exposed to research in the Art world from year one of their degree. *Sculpture & Spatial Practice 1*, taken in the first year of the Bachelor of Fine Art (Sculpture & Spatial Practice), has typical enrolment numbers of 18. This academic helps students develop their understanding of artistic works as a form of knowledge. Through the creation of their own artistic works, the academic assists the students in learning about being an artist, and how that practice is connected to a form of research activity in their field. As part of this learning experience, students are also introduced to the work of other artists, and taught that these are examples of that artist's research practice. Students undertaking first year studies in sculpture are also required to attend and participate in critique sessions of their work, individual and group tutorials, and feedback sessions. All of these learning activities are shaped by the research practice of the field. As students progress through their degree their engagement with research practice increases. This academic

believes that the integration of research provides students with the essential ability of being able to sustain their practice as an artist when they graduate from their degree.

“They’re so intertwined I don’t know how you would teach without representing other peoples’ research – I don’t know if you can!”

For further details:

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Handout/Teaching materials (if appropriate):

See page 3

The Appropriate System Project

The aim of this project is to learn to actively and critically investigate another artist's work, and through it, find approaches to practice that are useful for you.

Genius ... is the child of imitation.
– Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'Discourses on Art' (1774)

The word 'appropriate' has two meanings: one is about taking possession of, using as one's own; the other is about being 'proper' or 'fitting'. Both meanings are used in this project, because you are asked to appropriate another artist's system of working, and make it appropriate for yourself.

They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.
– Andy Warhol

For this exercise, 'system' is about thought; an approach to working and the setting of parameters around the concepts with which an artwork deals. In other words, it is about the area of research that an artist addresses in their work, and how they launch into exploring it.

Images also help me find and realise ideas. I look at hundreds of very different, contrasting images and I pinch details from them, rather like people who eat from other people's plates.
– Francis Bacon

A system is senior to a process; that is, a system can be made up of several processes. For example, a system can be a method of approach, a line of questioning, or processes of working through.

Art is ... pattern informed by sensibility.
– Sir Herbert Read, 'The Meaning of Art' (1955)

WEEK 1:

Randomly select an artist's name from the set list. Study the artist you get, looking for a 'system' to appropriate for yourself.

Meanwhile, we'll continue to develop your workshop skills. For example, we will give you a welding workshop. Be sure to have your boots, your goggles, ear protection, and a boiler suit. Keep these items well and you will have them for many years.

If people knew how hard I worked to get my mastery, it wouldn't seem so wonderful at all.
Michelangelo

WEEK 2:

A short (5-10 minute) presentation on that artist and the system you've decided to appropriate will occur in Week 2. You can show slides, pictures, photocopies, open books, etc. for this 'informal' presentation. Think about how your artist's system of working might be best described, and indicate how you'll appropriate that system for yourself. The 'Come as your Artist Tea Party' and Game is on (date to be confirmed). Bring nibbles, and be prepared; you'll be quizzed on every aspect of your artist's work, areas of research, influences, and relevance to contemporary practice.

WEEKS 3-5:

Plan and make your own work, doing so by applying one of the systems your artist used or uses. The objective is to make a work that is evident of, or results from, the system you have appropriated. You are **not** required to copy a work of your artist, or to make a 'look alike'.

WEEK 6: CRITIQUE

Work must be finished for presentation and discussion – Tuesday for those whose surname starts with A through N and Thursday for those with P through Z.