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Lesson Plan Concept Design: *It's All About Me*

This spring, I will be graduating from the photography program at OCADU and moving to North Bay, Ontario, for some well needed nature-infused living. A large portion of the artwork that I produce is grounded in self portraiture (examples can be seen here: www.sydneyrose.ca) and I feel very strongly about bringing the skills and knowledge that I have acquired over the past four years to a community that is notably 'underserved' in relation to Toronto's rich community for the arts and education through the arts. While the opportunities for success as a photo-based artist in a large city are endless, I see great importance in disseminating the very concentrated art culture beyond the city limits.

I would like to propose a supplementary or extracurricular conceptual art education program for North Bay area high school students (ages 13-17) and young adults (18-25) who demonstrate an elevated interest in pursuing visual arts. This course is intended for individuals who have prior experience working in a studio setting, and those who are confident in their art-making abilities. This is not a technical course, but the opportunity to learn new techniques and applications will frequently arise, as students are encouraged to think outside the box and choose the appropriate media to use, as it pertains to his or her unique approaches to the assignments. Putting emphasis on the idea that art can be made with and about anything provides the students with an environment in which anything goes – a space where the students can open up, feel the freedom to experiment and take risks, while maintaining a sense of authority over their work throughout the process.

In the beginning stages, this program would be run independently and would take place in my home studio, with hopes for expansion in the future (through a gallery or artist-run centre). Classes would take place for three hours, once a week, for a duration of eight weeks, and each class would consist of approximately eight students and one instructor (myself). Six three-hour long sessions will be made available to the students (Monday, Wednesday and Friday – 8:30am-11:30pm and 2:30pm-5:30pm), with a snack break at the halfway point. While I have designed this course to take place in my home studio, it may easily be adapted to suit the regulations of the Artists in Education Program, offered by the Ontario Arts Council, and could be adjusted to suit both younger and older age groups as well.

What I am proposing is an open-medium studio course, which focuses on the production and discussion of conceptually driven artwork, and is facilitated through a series of guided self-portraiture assignments and sketchbook activities. *It's All About Me* will focus on the development of ideas, experimentation and process work. Students will expand upon their independent research and presentation skills, as they will be encouraged to present their ideas and/or work in progress during each class. Group activities, both small and large, will foster an emphasis on perspective and diversity, while independent projects will encourage self-confidence in one's own uniqueness.

In this intensive program, the individual is seen as the building block of a community and by delving into the realm of the self, through creative exploration, we will be working on building a confident, open-minded and diverse community from the ground up. We are all first time humans and it is important for us to feel confident in sharing our stories and perspectives with one another. In order to get by in a globalized society, populated by just over seven billion people and counting, it is crucial for us to develop the ability to 'understand where another is

coming from'. In the weekly classes, students will participate in story-telling and role-playing activities to learn about how and why certain individuals may interpret a work of art, based on the details known about the perspective from which they may be approaching the content.

Over the course of a series of four guided, conceptual self-portraiture assignments, the students will be encouraged to work from the inside out. Assignments will be completed through a combination of both in-class studio time and the student's own time, outside of class. Numerical grades will be rejected in favour of constructive, written and verbal feedback. Students will be encouraged to present works in progress during each class, leaving more than enough room for discussion of the strengths, weaknesses and any improvements the individual may have made, every step of the way.

As a recent University graduate, I will serve as an excellent resource for those considering pursuing the arts beyond high school (I have kept all of my rather detailed notes and textbooks and intend to make these available for my students to explore). I also have been working on a conceptual art research/database project, *The Cluster Method* (<http://theclustermethod.ca>), with three other OCADU Photography students, which we intend to continue in the future and will also be made available to my students. If you factor in my strong ability to extrapolate ideas and to think outside the box, I'm certain that I will have a great impact on the students who participate in this program and will hopefully encourage them to continue their pursuit of the arts in our global community, with self-confidence.

Assignments

Assignment #1: *Who Are You... Really?*

(Hand Out/Discussion: Week 1, Presentation/Critique: Week 3)

This first assignment is about honesty. There is the ‘self’ we share with others in school, the ‘self’ we show our parents, the ‘self’ we are with our friends... but in each of these scenarios, there is a part of our ‘self’ that we hold back. In most cases, this is the part of us that is most true and makes us unique as individuals, but can also be the part that we are most hesitant to share. Please be aware that this assignment is **not** about your ideal ‘self’ (the way you wish other people would see you). It is about your genuine ‘self’ – who you *really* are.

I want you to consider yourself as being much more than what meets the eye (the superficial). This is not an exercise in realism. Use your imagination to help you determine how to creatively present your character traits, hobbies, interests, goals, aspirations, home life, culture, collections, secrets, etc. as a representation of your true self.

Upon presentation of this assignment, be prepared to discuss the following:

- Choice of media and how this relates to the aspects of yourself that you are trying to represent within your image.
- Who you are! Tell us about yourself and as you present your work, describe how and why it represents your true self.
- What you are happy with, what you wish you could change or do differently with regards to this project, and/or where you intend to go with it in the future.

Assignment #2: *First Impressions*

(Hand Out/Discussion: Week 1, Presentation/Critique: Week 4)

During the first class, after our introductions, we will go around the room and provide two adjectives about each of the members of our classroom. These words are not meant to be rude, discriminatory or hurtful by any means, but they should be honest, immediate and instinctive responses to the students in our class, based on first impressions. When it is your turn to be described, make a list of the given words in your sketchbook, as these will be a crucial element in creating this next piece of art.

For this second assignment, you will be creating a self-portrait based on some or all of the words that have been assigned to you by your fellow classmates. You may feel free to explore either the positive or negative interpretations of these words, or a combination of both. Consider how you might interpret these words and express how you feel about being described in this way. Think about how you could incorporate this into or express this through the production of your work of art.

Upon presentation of this assignment, be prepared to discuss the following:

- What descriptive words you have chose to use from our *First Impressions* discussion that took place during the first class.
- How you feel about being viewed in this way / the accuracy of this description.
- What you are happy with, what you wish you could change or do differently with regards to this project, and/or where you intend to go with it in the future.
- Your choice of media and why.

Assignment #3: Me as You

(Hand Out: Week 3, Presentation/Critique: Week 5)

After our critique and discussion of assignment #2, each student will be paired with another student, based on the differences in personality and lifestyle, as noted in the presentation of the first two assignments. You will be expected to sit down and chat with your partner, ask each other questions and get to know one another. Discussions may include topics such as hobbies, musical interests, family dynamics, cultural background, personal strengths and weaknesses, goals, aspirations, etc. Use this time wisely as these discussions will be crucial for the completion of this assignment.

Once you feel that you have a good sense of who your partner is and where he or she is coming from (perspective), I want you to think about how different your life would be if you were in his or her shoes. Use these thoughts to develop a self-portrait of yourself as if you were your fellow student.

You will present your individual art piece alongside your partner. This allows us, as a class, the opportunity to see: you, your partner, you as your partner, and your partner as you – all at the same time.

Upon presentation of this assignment, be prepared to discuss the following:

- What you have learned about your partner (describe them, their lifestyle, background, etc – what makes them unique).
- How and why you chose to represent yourself in the way you did.
- Your choice of media and why.
- How well you feel your partner has portrayed themselves in your shoes – is there anything vital they may have left out?

- What you are happy with, what you wish you could change or do differently with regards to this project, and/or where you intend to go with it in the future.

Assignment #4: Group Self-Portrait

(Hand Out: Week 5, Presentation/Critique: Week 8)

Now that we have introduced ourselves and explored how we view one another, explored each other's perspectives and discovered differences and similarities amongst us, it is time for us to create a self-portrait of us as a class. Even though there may be a small number of us, we can consider our class a community.

As a group, we will go through every step in the process of creating a collaborative work of art that represents us as a community. From brainstorming, conceptual development and media choice to the physical creation of the final work, we will work as a team to create a portrait of our class.

(Optional) Final Group Exhibition

At the end of the eight-week course, I would like to provide the students with the opportunity to take part in a group exhibition (depending on the number of students enrolled), showcasing the most successful self-portrait from each of the young artists who have participated in the program. This will provide the students with an opportunity to connect with their peers and fellow artists, and to present their creations to the North Bay community.

Examples of Potential Weekly Sketchbook Assignments:

- 1) Self-portrait as an **animal**. (Human-animal hybrid is okay, too).
- 2) Self-portrait as a **celebrity**. (If you were famous, what kind of famous would you be?)
- 3) Self-portrait as a **plant**. (Think about your personality traits in addition to your physically characteristics and choose your plant accordingly).
- 4) Self-portrait as the embodiment of **your biggest fear**.
- 5) Self-portrait as your **ideal self**. (If every detail were up to you, totally customized self).
- 6) Self-portrait as a **map**. (Be creative – If you were a map, what would you be a map of?).
- 7) Self-portrait as a **building**. (Think about the materials, shapes and sizes of buildings you have seen. How could you apply these to your personality and physical appearance?).
- 8) Self-portrait as your very first **“when I grow up...”**
- 9) Self-portrait as your **distorted reflection** as it appears in an unusually formed, reflective surface (spoon, curved mirror, mutli-layered windows, etc).
- 10) **Blind** self-portrait from memory. (Draw yourself without looking a mirror, at a picture of yourself or at the paper you are drawing on).

Resources and Materials I Intend to Have in My Classroom / Studio:

- Computer and digital projector.
- Chalkboard and chalk / whiteboard and markers.
- Large pads of newsprint and cartridge paper for sketching and taking class / group notes.
- Two work tables that comfortably seat four students each (ideally repurposed or donated by the community), as well as a desk for myself.
- Misc. art materials: pencils, markers, crayons, pens, paint, ink, pastels, glue, tape, magazines, tissue paper, boards, etc. (I feel that emphasis should be placed on repurposing, salvaging and working within one’s own means, so ideally these materials would also be donated by the community and/or the students).

- Bookshelves and storage cubbies for art-related texts, supplies and student works.
- Numerous examples of my own self-portraiture projects on display.

Materials Provided by the Students:

- A sketchbook.
- Any equipment needed to pursue a specific media-based approach (digital cameras, lenses, laptops, tablets, etc.)
- Optional extra art materials (paints, pencils, brushes, etc. – a limited supply of materials will be supplied).
- A snack or lunch – Students will have a 30-minute break at the halfway point of each class.