

## Chapter 58

# Putting Paint to Canvas: Artful Teaching Strategies for Teachers of Adult Learners

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this chapter is to inform the readers about how to artfully design seamless instruction for adult learners. The authors approached this concept by drawing a connection between the processes of making beautiful art and designing instruction geared toward adult learners. The authors identified several aspects of adult learning theory applied to the following instructional strategies: clear learning objectives, differentiated instruction, formative and summative assessment, and use of descriptive feedback. The authors provided several examples of these instructional strategies intended to support adult learners.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tim is an artist. He is creative. He is detailed. He is purposeful. Gina is a teacher. She is creative. She is detailed. She is purposeful. As you can probably tell, this chapter will explore the beautiful intersection between art and designing meaningful lessons for adult learners. Before we delve into Tim's and Gina's respective stories, it is important to build a foundation of why Tim the Artist and Gina the Teacher are such prominent components of this book chapter designed for those who support adult learners. We believe seamless instructional flow for adult learners is, in its most refined form, artistic. Therefore, we want to connect you to the idea that you must embrace your artistic self in order to design seamless and meaningful instruction for adults. Now, Tim's story.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8598-6.ch058

## **Putting Paint to Canvas**

Tim is the Department Chair of Visual Arts at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. His work in academia is dedicated to preparing undergraduate students to become visual artists. A significant portion of Tim's students also seek licensure as K - 12 teachers. Tim's office looks just as you would expect a Visual Arts professor's office to look. In a word it is "artistic". A large iMac desktop computer sits atop his desk. Perhaps, a better description of this machine is that it is gargantuan. This is quite literally, the largest iMac either of us has ever seen. You know, the type of iMac that only artists seem to own? Somehow, the super-large iMac does not dominate Tim's workspace. Instead, the artifacts that Tim has strategically placed in his office dominate the space. These artifacts deeply resonated with us.

Tim's passion is social photography, so it makes perfect sense that the walls of his office are adorned with various photographs capturing the emotions sparked by people, places, and events. Also, Tim has managed to procure a section of a row of theatre seats which are set against the opposite wall of the office door. One cannot help but instantaneously notice this mini-row of seats as you enter Tim's office. Their presence in the office serve as a stark reminder that you are likely to witness art when in Tim's presence, just as you are likely to witness art when you are perched in seats like this in your choice of theatres all over the world. Each of the artifacts had its own purpose for its presence--they were present to remind you that you were in the presence of an artist.

When we held our conversation with Tim, we asked him two basic questions: Do you plan art or does art occur naturally, and you there just to witness it? Tim stated that in his work with his visual arts students, he is able to observe art in its most pure, less contrived form. He mentioned the power of the epiphany that occurs when his students truly begin to see themselves as the artists they are becoming. Tim admitted that while art occurs and he is there as a witness, the conditions must be ripe to witness such beautiful occurrences with consistency. While some artists spend hours in their studios agonizing over major concepts and how to portray the art they will produce, Tim prefers to go to the places where art may be made and spend his time working to make sure the art he witnesses is meaningful.

*That (epiphany moment) comes and goes. I find myself as a photographer that I have to be there. I'm not an artist who sits in his studio and mulls over big concepts. I let the concepts and ideas come to me because I'm a social photographer that requires me to be out in the world. (Abler, 2017)*

As our conversation progressed it became clear to us that artists are more special than we originally thought they were. They have a unique way of honing their senses to, in effect, slow down or pause time. They are able to see what others take for granted during our daily walk of life. Artists like Tim are able to witness art as it occurs when others do not. Clavon asked Tim straightaway: "How is it that YOU get to see the art when others do not?" Tim's response was pure gold. In essence, he has trained his eyes and his mind to purposefully see the world differently. Tim understands the impact of tonalities and other variables on the art he will ultimately witness and produce. He observes the world for all that it has to offer, not just through the lens of the mechanical tools at his disposal.

We argue that in order to produce artfully designed, seamless instruction for adult learners, we have to train our senses and our minds to interact differently to environments supporting our adult learners. We must look differently at the students, the classroom, and the content we are teaching as well as the tools we have at our respective disposals. This is where Gina's story interacts with Tim's.

Gina is the Program Chair of Master of Arts in Teaching at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. Gina's professional work is dedicated to preparing potential educators for initial licensure to teach in PK - 12 settings. Gina's students come to her with a bachelors degree and a dream to be an impactful

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