

Classroom Narrative

Christy Gigliotti, Pub Lab, Period 1, Commercial Photography 1

Students and Classroom

The classroom space is large, it makes the already small number of 14 students in the class seem even smaller. Most of the eight or so large tables only have one student to them with a small group of three seniors in the front and three students including a friend duo at the table next to them who I sit with. This size is not even counting the dark room or film development room attached to the larger classroom. The students are more-or-less self sufficient yet the class culture still leans toward teacher-based rather than student-based. It is easily the most lecture-heavy art class I have ever been a part of and I found myself daydreaming or getting easily distracted despite wanting to write down everything the students were so I could get a feel of being a student in the class.

I don't find lecture a "bad" teaching style, most of my critique lesson is in the form of a lecture, but the classroom environment doesn't lend to open participation or feeling safe enough to share thoughts even if they're wrong. Yesterday (9/21), Christy spent more than half the class time re-teaching the elements and principles of art despite students already having notes on them from the previous photo assignment. The purpose was to fill out a "camera cheat sheet" that they could use on their final and when they're taking pictures. That's great, I'm a fan of giving them multiple tools to succeed. But I feel this approach took too much of their studio time to develop their photos. She also introduced the next photo prompt so they could take pictures over the long weekend, which was great. But after all that, there was only about 30 minutes left to develop photos, I'm not sure if you have ever developed photos, but that is barely enough time to get a photo fully developed. While she was re-lecturing the elements and principles, the group of seniors near me in the front were getting irritable, nearly begging to be dismissed to develop their photos as they used their previous notes to quickly fill out the cheat sheet in the beginning.

The group of seniors have it down, they may or may not notice if Christy or I were even in the room, it reminds me of how I moved around my high school's art department my senior year, I could have taught my art classes then just as I'm sure they could with this class. They depend on each other rather than the teacher for questions and curiosities and because of that they

experiment and have more fun than other students. They also finish the assignments much earlier than other students so they regularly use this class as a study hall or talk and joke amongst themselves, they are never much of a distraction so they're left to be.

Nearly half the students are Latina and I picked up immediately that Christy goes about conversations with them, especially about completing classwork and taking pictures/remembering to bring their cameras in differently than she does with other students, more accusatorily and belittling. There is a distinct barrier in her attempts to build relationships with who she views as her troubled students because of their ethnicity. I am not saying this lightly. She has directly admitted this to me while talking to her yesterday (9/21) asking if any students had IEPs or 504s. It was after period 1, during passing period I quietly asked her if there were any IEPs or 504s for period 1 as I needed to know for an assignment. She responded that there weren't any but if I needed to write about hardships in the classroom I could talk about the cultural barriers with some students. I had a feeling this was not going somewhere positive but I hesitantly said, "ok..." and she elaborated (note: I do not remember this word-for-word partly because I was shocked to be hearing it at all) saying that the barrier is due to the culture of some students not wanting to put effort in or work very hard. She then said that she has built a relationship with the friend duo that sits by me but there is a student in the back that she has not gotten though to yet.

Personally, I don't believe she has succeeded in developing any sort of relationship with either of them. They are all so funny and sweet when you get to talk to them. The student in the back for example, she forgot her camera on Tuesday and when I made my rounds checking in on everyone I asked if she had film developing (there are five and ten-minute intervals where the film just needs to sit in the chemicals or water and usually the students pull out their phones and sit in the main classroom during these times) because her laptop and phone were out. She said she left her camera at home again and I said something like, "Man, I hate when that happens, and you took all the photos too right? That sucks." she nodded and I suggested she do an in-class assignment on Classroom they were all told about at the beginning of class. She started working and I walked away.

On Thursday she had her camera and when worktime started, she waited until Christy went into the dark room and asked if I could help her develop her film (I was so excited). I got her started

in putting the film in the reel and checked in again when she was finished and getting ready to start with the chemicals and I made a joke on how it's the longest minutes of your life, like how time passes when you're holding a plank but even longer. She laughed and I realized this is the first time I had ever seen her smile.

The other scattered students around the room are pretty much on top of things, only needing quick check-ins to stay on track. The friend duo I sit by talk to each other in Spanish in between doing work and they occasionally switch to English to include me which I'm grateful for. We discussed tattoos and piercings that turned into makeup and fashion and eventually became photography-related.

Modifications and Adaptations

Christy emailed me later yesterday saying there is a student with an IEP and that we can talk more about it Tuesday. She only has a hard copy so she couldn't share it with me. I don't know much about the student with the IEP, I've only seen her once or twice in class and yesterday her cough sounded real bad, I assume she's been out sick. Otherwise, it's not too much an accommodation as making sure students see themselves represented but I made sure to include a diverse set of artists in my presentation examples. The goal of my lesson is to give them more tools to use during critique to talk about their own and each other's work, in itself it is scaffolding and trying to lift students that may not have as much experience in an art class to a higher level while reminding and lifting those at a higher level as well. I will rely on sharing out but will model my expectations by sharing out first and giving students some background on the piece/pieces at the end before moving on as if I were the artist.