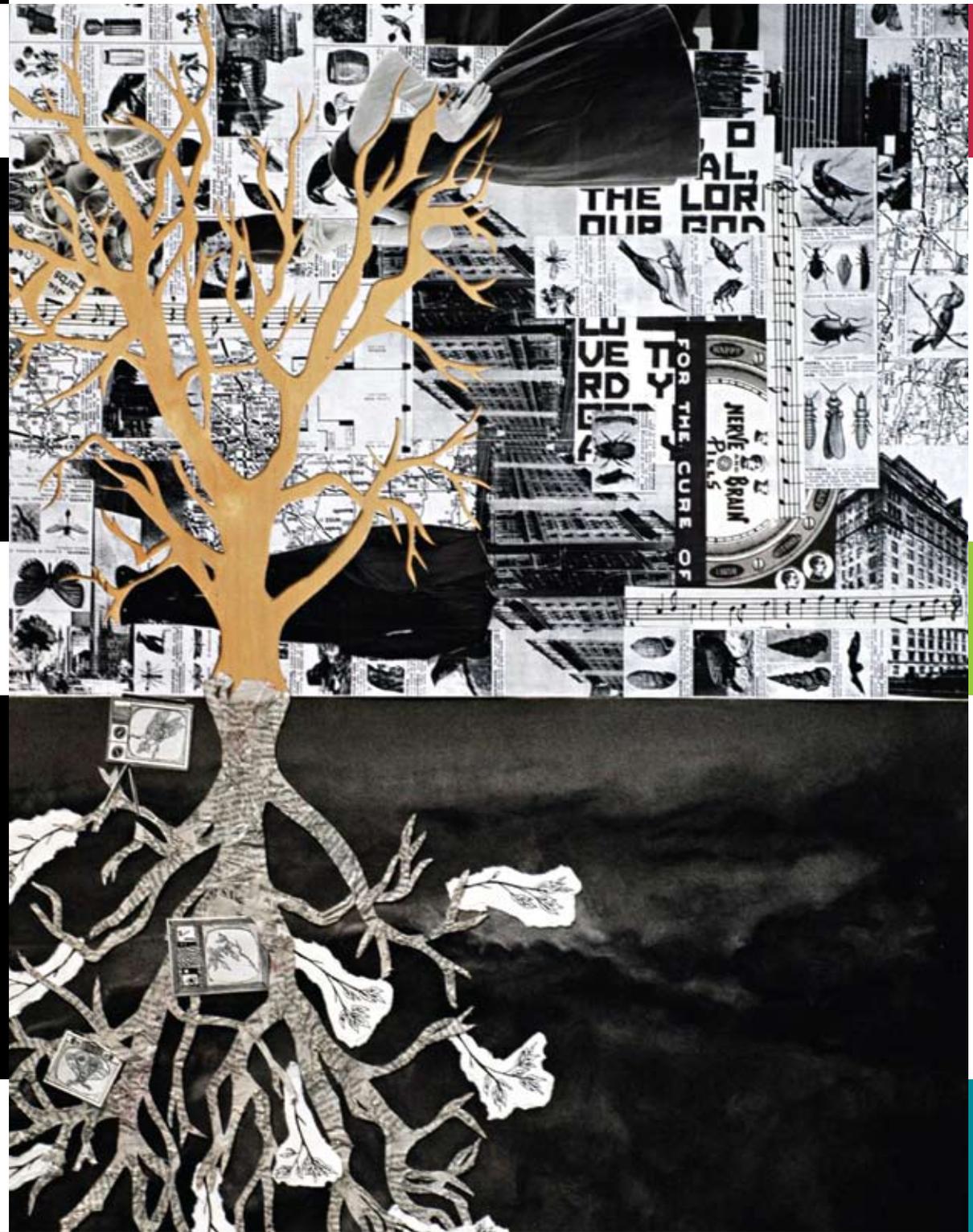


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SPECIAL SECTION

Putting Theory to Work:

Building a Foundations Program for the 21st Century

Report from *ThinkTank 3* at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

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School of Art

The *Integrative Teaching ThinkTank* is an annual forum focused on the future of art foundations programs. *ThinkTank3*, held at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago from June 6 – 11, 2008, brought together art and design master teachers, administrators, and emerging educators. With representatives from 25 major universities, the 5-day symposium was a high-energy opportunity to link educational theory to studio practice and to develop ideas, concepts and frameworks addressing “21st Century Art Foundations Programs.”

ThinkTank3 was facilitated by Mary Stewart, Foundations Program Director at Florida State University, and Jim Elniski, Associate Professor of Art Education and past Director of the First Year Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The forum was organized in two “stages.” Stage 1 was for master teachers to discuss broad conceptual concerns. In Stage 2, emerging educators were guided in the development of instruction/project assignments in response to the conceptual frameworks identified and developed in Stage 1. The two primary goals of this collective process were 1) to reflect on the theoretical challenges of developing a curriculum with relevance in the 21st century and, 2) to develop concrete foundations projects, activities, and assignments that moved well beyond the tried and true “elements and principles” approach to art and design education. This article seeks to capture the profound blend of “theory and practice” that emerged from *ThinkTank3*, and to highlight the linkages between the constructs laid out in Stage 1 processes and the projects developed by Stage II participants. Here is where theory is truly “put to work.”

Lists of participants in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 can be found at the end of this essay in Appendices I and II.

STAGE 1: FOUNDATIONS IN THEORY

During Stage 1, thirty-three deans, departmental chairs, foundations coordinators, and other master educators were engaged in intensive discussions based on the following topics:

Contextual & Critical Connections: The Role of History/Theory in the Education of Studio Artists, facilitated by Dr. John Baldacchino

Finding Common Ground Between Art & Design Education, facilitated by Helen Maria Nugent.

Beyond Computers: New Technologies and Teacher Training, facilitated by Dan Collins.

Constructing Meaning: From Idea to Image or Object, facilitated by Peter Winant.

Each Stage 1 panel generated a summative report. While it is beyond the scope of this synopsis to present each in its entirety, a number of important “21st Century themes” emerged from the discussion. These include:

1. Combining Studio Practice and Theory
2. Consciousness of Action
3. The Multiplicity of Meaning
4. The Role of Critique
5. Participatory Frameworks
6. Technology – from Digital Media to Social networking
7. The Millennial Student and 21st Century Culture
8. Diversity and Inclusively
9. Revisiting the Elements and Principles

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As is apparent from the list above, only a small percentage of the themes to emerge from the two-day discussion emphasized classical “elements and principles” pedagogy. Far greater emphasis was given to activities that were informed by the history of art and design, the expanded role of technology in teaching foundations, the importance of collaborative and cooperative teaching models, common ground in design and art education, and the orientation of students (so-called “millennials,” non-traditional students, or students from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds). While traditional studio skills were still seen as valuable by many participants in Stage 1 (particularly the “Common Ground” group which discussed the commonalities and differences between art and design education), it was universally understood that a 21st century approach to foundations teaching needs to be tied to pedagogical goals that reflect a deeper and more complex understanding of contemporary society and the world at large.

21st Century Themes

Each of the themes identified above was explored in depth by one or more of the breakout groups. A number of theoretical positions emerged from each team.

1. Combining Studio Practice with Theory

For Helen Maria Nugent’s *Common Ground* group, one of the primary learning priorities in 21st century foundation education is to teach agility in thinking and making, and an ability to deal with complexity. To participate actively in the emerging ecology of production, students must have competencies in multiple modes of *thinking/doing* (visual, linguistic, behavioral, and cognitive), and have the ability to communicate effectively with their audiences.

Foundations faculty initiate a process of learning that serves as a basis on which the disciplines can build and channels students into more expansive modes of thinking and making. Upon successful completion of this essential work, students can confidently engage with their discipline, building on what is established broadly at the foundations level, then re-interpreted as needed by upper-level coursework.

Reinforcing the conclusions of Nugent’s team, John Baldacchino’s *History/Theory* group argued that the primary purpose of the Foundation year should be an introduction to critical thinking. They reminded the assembled group that focusing on the skills of creating, researching, reading, discussing, and writing help students gain competencies in critique, critical thinking, and critical theory¹.

For the *History/Theory* group, these skills form the basis for thinking across a broad number of disciplines and are not unique to the visual arts. In visual arts education, “historical, contextual, and critical studies” take a central role in the verbal and conceptual articulation of the visual. However, Studio and Theory are not separate from the formal skills of creating, but need to be seamlessly integrated. Pedagogically this means that educators need to facilitate an environment where students take ownership and experiment with this integration. Such an environment engages students and allows them to see the larger role of art making in our culture. Foundations teachers are then encouraged to revel in their role as generalists – to introduce and blend ideas with passion, knowledge and their own professional experience.

2. Consciousness of Action

Baldacchino’s group also stressed the pedagogical concept of ‘consciousness of action’. This construct suggests that learning is an act that does not happen spontaneously but involves reflection and a conscious participation from both the educator and the student. In this partnership both teacher and student learn to be reflective (and careful) in what they say and do. Mutual understanding means that both educator and learner know each other’s objectives and both understand each other’s roles. This allows the Foundations year to become a nurturing experience, and establishes a process through which students realize their goals and make conscious choices for their future. The Foundations Program becomes a constructive experience that assists students in gaining confidence in their processes as visual artists and designers while honoring who students are and who they want to become.

3. Multiplicity of Meaning

Strongly related to the “critical thinking” approach of Baldacchino’s group was Peter Winant’s *Constructing Meaning* panel. This group recommended that foundation instructors cultivate and recognize opportunities to explore contextual associations that connect students’ work to their personal history, cultural experience, and contemporary practice. Winant’s group maintained that such connections provide students with a framework to associate seemingly purely formal constructs with a broad range of conceptual applications. Additionally, the group recommended projects that emphasize the value of inquiry and that reward thoughtful risk taking and personal investment on the part of students.

4. The Role of Critique

Winant’s *Constructing Meaning* panel also suggested that instructors describe a variety of approaches to the critique process. They recommended that instructors seek out what is meaningful in the work, even if the piece as a whole is inconclusive or unformed, and use this as an opportunity to help direct the student’s idea development. The panel emphasized that the goal of a critique is not resolution but articulating meanings that emerge from the critique process. Also, they suggested that instructors allow for a range of reactions to a single work to be voiced, without forcing a resolution, or “correct” meaning that silences others, with the recognition that a student can have a meaningful experience with a work of art that the instructor does not share. And lastly, the panel recommended broadening the frame of the students’ experience by connecting the objectives and issues that arise in the critique with a discussion of cultural contexts and contemporary and historical art references.

The recognition of possible meaning in a work often begins with an objective description. The ability to recognize and articulate objective description is a necessary skill to impart to students. Often students’ confusion between subjective response and objective analysis results in an obfuscation of possible meaning in the artwork. Subjective response has validity, as meaning often is associated with memory and personal history. Therefore, critique requires both intellectual rigor and flexibility in order to best serve the students’ need to understand the problems and potential in what their work is communicating.

Additionally, a consideration of context is intrinsic to the development and recognition of meaning. Instructors should cultivate and recognize opportunities to explore contextual associations that connect students’ work to their personal history, cultural experience, and contemporary practice. Such connections provide students with a framework to associate seemingly purely formal constructs with a broad range of conceptual applications. Projects that emphasize the value of inquiry and that reward thoughtful risk taking will enhance the students’ personal investment in them. Including a discussion of a student’s process and exploration as a part of critique can underscore this value.

5. Participatory Frameworks

Beyond Computing participant David Bogen referenced the work of Henry Jenkins, Director of the MIT Comparative Studies Media Program. Jenkins explores the current cultural transition towards increasing use of technology under the heading of “participatory frameworks” (Jenkins, 2006). Experiences and expectations concerning our own agency are being altered continually by our position within networked environments. This needs to be understood as part of a more generalized media experience in contemporary society.

With respect to educational institutions, we need to leverage, enable, and to help shape the nature of these experiences and expectations regarding the texture of participatory frameworks. The “Question of Technology” requires the development of sophisticated approaches to the design of both the production and the interactive elements of the educational experience. These new participatory frameworks and technologies suggest a shift and expansion of the “elements and principles” that have largely defined our métier for so many decades.

6. Technology – from Digital Media to Social Networking

There was general agreement in Collins’s *Beyond Computing* group that computers, digital media, and social networking have become integral parts of contemporary experience – and the studio classroom. Collins’s group addressed how the entire landscape of emerging

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technologies is fundamentally altering how we construct and maintain relationships, exchange information, and make and distribute work. The panel discussed how the educational challenges extend far beyond the frame of the art classroom. Along with the expanded creative opportunities provided to instructors by digital media, students themselves have embraced a host of digital products – from iPods, to gaming, to social networking sites. These products and skill-sets can be harnessed to expand creativity.

The task of integrating technology into foundations experiences and implementing deeper theoretical goals using technology proved more challenging for the panel. The group asked the questions: How can foundations art teachers use digital media to leverage, enable and help to shape the nature of the first year experience? How can they find their place in this rapidly changing landscape – and become successful at harnessing the power of digital media without sacrificing their identity as artists and their goals as educators?

The dissonance at the heart of the debate surrounding the use of digital media was found to be resonant with other historical moments that produced new technologies, such photography or video. New media are disruptive of existing practice, and thereby bring into view both the issues associated with inventing new practices and the methods (and the merits) of the ways we are already doing some of these things.

7. The Millennial Student and 21st Century Culture

In addition to expanded curricular and media options, Collins's and Nugent's groups emphasized just how crucial it is to recognize the changing character of foundation students. Most if not all of our foundation art students are "millennials" (born between 1980 – 2000) who are:

- Inherently defined by complete immersion and fluid integration with technology.
- Efficient at multi-tasking but often weak in their ability to concentrate on one subject for a sustained period of time (Tucker, 2006).
- Characterized by their constant need for connectedness and satisfy this need through text and instant messaging, emailing, blogging, using chat rooms, web surfing, and pod casting.
- Strong in their desire to be socially connected in the classroom and in collaboration with others (Tucker, 2006).
- One of the most protected generations in history, are recognized as respected members of their family structure, and have been involved in family decision-making at early ages. This established role leads them to be decision makers in the classroom and in cooperative group activities (Tucker, 2006).
- High in self-esteem and have strong expectations for respect and recognition of the work they do.
- A protected generation that has been coddled and recognized for multiple achievements, no matter how small. This poses a potential threat when they enter a studio course and deal with the constant constructive criticism of their work and their abilities when they have received directly the opposite in their prior experiences (Raines, 2002).
- Possessed of a sense of entitlement towards information, specifically how and what is disseminated and why (Raines, 2002).
- Educated since elementary school in the new learning paradigm; that is, they are comfortable working in groups and possess an understanding of the cooperative learning process such as individual accountability, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, and group processing (Johnson et. al, 1998).
- Burdened with expectations started early in life, millennials work at a level that focuses on achievement at the expense of investigation or experimentation (Raines, 2002).

The question facing educators is how to redefine "classroom" from the traditional five or six contact hours a week to a 24/7 learning experience.

The question facing students is how to move past the entertainment model that defines their relationship to technology and link it to critical thinking and pedagogical goals and objectives.

8. Diversity and Inclusivity

Closely related in spirit to the discussion surrounding the millennial student was Helen Maria Nugent's *Common Ground* discussion on the

challenges of acknowledging diversity and promoting inclusivity in our foundation studios.

At many institutions, foundations courses are taught primarily by fine arts faculty. In an ideal world both designers and fine artists would teach at the beginning level. Given the demands of degree programs on faculty resources, one of the *Common Ground* panel recommendations is to focus on diversity of approaches and thinking when staffing foundation courses—regardless of whether this comes through one person, or a group of diversely educated individuals (artists, designers, art educators, etc).

In order to create an educational environment that serves both art and design students, the foundations level curriculum must actively practice an ‘attitude of inclusiveness’. This mindful inclusiveness can be demonstrated by what is shown (a diversity of examples), by what is experienced (a diversity of approaches, methods and practices), and by what is produced (a diversity of projects and practices).

The Foundation Program has the potential to be an intersection for many different voices and processes, which encourage students to discover new ways of seeing and doing, and which acknowledge and integrate both art and design concepts and practices.

9. Revisiting the Elements and Principles

There was general agreement that the “elements and principles” we have relied upon for over eighty years should be updated to reflect the changing nature of the field and the socio-cultural context in which we live. The original elements and principles as formulated by Arthur Wesley Dow in the early 20th century were developed in a cultural moment that was essentially pre-electronic – pre-radio, pre-television, pre-computer, pre-Internet.

In her essay, *A History of Design Theory in Art Education*, Nanyoung Kim writes of the “elements and principles”:

Despite the presumably important status of these art concepts in current art education practices, there has not been much theoretical debate. Are they really so fundamental as to not raise questions? Are they universal? Who decided which fundamentals are more fundamental than others?... Are we following the teaching strategies of college foundation design courses in a more or less diluted version? (Kim, 2006).

Are the elements and principles as currently understood adequate to describe the range of design options, organizational strategies, and inquiry methods available to our students? If not, what “elements and principles” have been left out of the equation?

A 21st century curriculum needs to be responsive to the dynamic and emergent conditions and requirements of its culture. The objective elements (line, shape, texture, value, etc) and principles (unity, emphasis, balance, rhythm, scale/proportion, etc.), while relevant to studio practice, provide little foundation in those skills and strategies (“markers for success”) that are essential in our shared and increasingly interconnected world. Rather than being static descriptors of formal relationships, a truly 21st century foundations trades in active signifiers and processes. Rather than “nouns,” a 21st century foundation cultivates “verbs.” Rather than providing recipes that effectively echo “modernist” standards and assumptions, a 21st century curriculum is a “shape shifter” that can provide a useful framework regardless of media, circumstance, modality, or cultural context.

If our goal as foundations educators is to promote 21st century understanding, then the palette of “principles” needs to be updated.

Beyond Technology panelist, Bonnie Mitchell, recommended an expanded list of elements and principles to reflect the broader scope of contemporary foundations programs. The panel found the “old elements and principles” to be lacking in specific areas such as “time.” Time-based concepts such as movement, sequencing, duration can be introduced using traditional studio activities such as multi-panel narratives, accordion books, flip books, zoetropes, or digital media. Performance, sound, and video works, often born through a traditional process of drawing, storyboards, and research, can be presented using digital media.

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Other alternative categories and frameworks were considered. The *Beyond Computing* group brainstormed a list: framing, visual syntax, editing strategies (audio, visual, textual), pattern recognition, symbolic notation, hierarchy and structure, context, interactivity, collaborative practice, community and participatory activities.

Jenkins's ideas about participatory culture (introduced in #5 above) provide a compelling starting point for a very different "foundations program." Some features/qualities of this emerging paradigm could include:

- Play – the capacity to experiment with your surroundings as a form of problem-solving
- Performance – the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
- Simulation – the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real world processes
- Appropriation – the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
- Multitasking – the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.
- Distributed Cognition – the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities
- Collective Intelligence – the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal
- Judgment – the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources
- Transmedia Navigation – the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
- Networking – the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information
- Negotiation – the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

To emphasize relationships between theory and practice, Baldacchino's group shape-shifted "elements and principles" into "elements and practices." The group recommended that a Foundations Program for the 21st Century include a dynamic and conscious integration between the two forms of inquiry that take place in the discipline – i.e. historical-contextual and critical inquiry, and studio-based inquiry. These forms of inquiry contain the following elements:

- The criteria for making
- The knowledge of context
- The understanding of judgment
- The skills of caring (qua empathy)

These translate into the following practices:

- The language of the discipline (visual, studio-based and critical)
- An expanded set of references to art and design (contextual-historical, skill-based, critical)
- A personal narrative of critical thinking, critique, and critical theory
- A set of self-reflective and empathetic skills (art's social responsibility, art's formal autonomy, art's polity)

Recommendations

The following lists condense the finding of the four panels:

1. *Contextual & Critical Connections: The Role of History/Theory in the Education of Studio Artist* (Baldacchino)
 - Discuss and identify criteria for making thoughtful and constructive judgments about student work.
 - Foster classroom dynamics and introduce projects that develop higher order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, application, judgment) so students have the means with which to make intelligent choices in their artistic processes.
 - Use opportunities to engage students in dialogues that will increase their ability to assess their own work and the work of others.
 - Teach, use, and encourage the use of the language of visual art.
 - Expand one's concept of teaching and one's students' concept of art making and creative processes.

- Create opportunities to expose students to the history and praxis of art and design as plural narratives.
- Encourage discussion to allow students to grasp the integration of interdisciplinary content within studio art.
- Introduce a reversed time-line — where students relate to history from a starting point that is theirs and not from a remote folklore that seems to remain in books and historical assumptions.
- Get serious about the study of non-Western cultures — where the idea of culture is extended from one of localism or tradition to a living notion of culture where integration is the basis for people's lives.
- Foster an understanding of popular and visual culture — where through an understanding of history and of society, students would start to critically appraise and engage with popular forms of culture and their visual manifestation.

2. Constructing Meaning: From Idea to Image or Object (Winant)

- Design assignments that facilitate a discussion of meaning — structured so as to begin simply and build in complexity, allowing the meaning of the work to develop over time.
- Separate the intended meaning from its source (i.e., the intended meaning by the individual student who is creating/generating the work versus the "meaning" of the original source).
- Challenge students to develop personal or "local" meaning rather than adopting clichéd or preconceived notions.
- Encourage students' ownership of their work by providing opportunities to invest themselves in their projects, rather than fulfill the instructor's expectations of what is meaningful. Allow for a range of reactions to a single work to be voiced, without forcing a resolution, or "correct" meaning that silences others, with the recognition that a student can have a meaningful experience with a work of art that the instructor doesn't share.
- Conduct research both in and outside of the studio in the pursuit of the possibilities of meaning.
- Encourage students to move in and out of ideas as they move towards increasing specificity in a project, in other words: describe, expand, edit, and prioritize – then repeat as needed. Emphasizing the value of inquiry and rewarding thoughtful risk-taking will enhance the students' personal investment in both.
- Look for what students already find interesting in their work and help them expand their sense of what is meaningful, while encouraging students to recognize their own discoveries as contrasted with a given or known idea.
- Construct experiences so students learn how to work through the unknown by stressing the relationship between learning, play, and pleasure as well as the connections between exploration, failure, criticism, editing and creation.
- Emphasize how critique is intrinsic to the understanding of how meaning is generated and perceived.
- Remind students that the objectives of any critique are multifold, but even the most technique-oriented critique addresses what the work is communicating.
- In a critique situation, consider how a work is meaningful, rather than, "What does it mean?"
- Balance subjective responses with objective analyses.
- Consider context and its intrinsic relationship to the development and recognition of meaning in students' work.
- Broaden the frame of the students' experience by connecting the objectives and issues that arise in the critique with a discussion of cultural contexts and contemporary and historical art references.
- Re-think assignment objectives. The evaluation of how a student conceptualizes and constructs meaning should be included in the grading rubric in a way that encourages risk taking and innovative intellectual problem solving. Evidence of critical thinking in the design of the concept, during, and after critique stages can be identified by asking, "Did you re-address issues regarding your project after the critique?"
- Discuss works in progress. The ability and willingness of a student to communicate with the instructor about concept during all stages of project development is of the utmost importance.
- Benevolently subvert students' assumptions of how meaning is conceived, produced, and received in art making.
- Remember that "one size does NOT fit all" when developing strategies for embedding "meaning" into the foundation curriculum.

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3. *Beyond Computing* (Collins)

- Create a social network for foundation art educators with the following features:
 - includes valuable resources that invite repeated access
 - includes examples of student work
 - provides effective design solutions
 - gives assignments with a place to comment on and post the results
 - provides a place for teachers to share ideas, ask questions, and comments
 - provides a place for students to share ideas, artwork, and connect with each other
 - includes a central unifying space for both students and teachers
 - can be molded by the community to become what people need
 - is easily accessible
 - can be molded to whatever students need (make their own designed pages, etc.)
 - allows connections between foundation students across the country (world?)
- Acknowledge the potential of portable technologies used by students as a potential set of creative tools and processes
- If a program would like to preserve a traditional curriculum, but add new media, the discussion needs to extend beyond instruction in software applications. We don't want everything looking like an Adobe product.
- For general computer literacy training, an institution's Information Technology department should be used.

4. *Finding Common Ground between Art & Design Education* (Nugent)

- continue to teach 20th century formal issues, but deliver this material in a manner appropriate to the 21st century.
- teach both visual *and* spatial literacy
- engage students in developing a productive working process (make/test/reflect/iterate)
- facilitate polemical thinking – active questioning, evaluation, and interpretation
- enable students to deal with complexity, information density, and the unknown (learn how to edit, categorize, and see relationships)
- help students learn how to locate their primary interests, and develop their knowledge using a wide array of research methods (deep and wide)
- assist students in dealing with failure by learning how to define a failure/success trajectory
- focus on diversity of approaches and thinking when staffing foundation courses

Curricular Implications

Given the theoretical foundation and recommendations to emerge from Stage 1, two questions are raised:

1. How can these recommendations find expression in the assignments we develop?
2. What are some key considerations that distinguish what we have done in the past from what we hope to do in the future?

As we consider revisiting those "tried and true" projects from a well-worn repertoire or set to the task of writing new projects, what can be used to update curricula? Below is a table to help with the process of evaluating both one's current foundation curriculum in light of "21st century" concepts. Please be advised that there is no intention here of jettisoning the "traditional foundation." After careful reflection, if the educational objective or assessment target has not shifted, "no change" may be the best answer.

TRADITIONAL FOUNDATION

Top down teaching model (“sage on the stage”).
Information flows from teacher to student.
Little interaction between students.
Little or no feedback from students to instructor.

Design solutions free of context

Passive acceptance by students of received ideas

Static elements and principles

Drive towards simplicity, clarity of design
(e.g., focal points, clear pattern, gestalt)

Western focus exclusively

Discipline centric

Subjective response sufficient

Unexamined “universal” meanings accepted
without careful weighing of evidence

Single discipline

Skill based

One size fits all

Self sufficient, conceptually resolved, self contained

One schedule fits all

Personal expression (only)

Individual intelligence

Uni-modal with single pathway for navigation

Emphasis on “singular point of view”

Single “right” answer

Hierarchical

broadcast

TRANSFORMATIVE FOUNDATION

Bottom up “participatory” model (cooperative
learning with the “guide on the side”).
Participatory frameworks. Multiple pathways
for interaction — instructor to student,
student to instructor, student to student

Context driven

Active questioning, evaluation, and interpretation
by students leading to critical appraisal.

Dynamic elements and principles

Acknowledgement of formal and conceptual
complexity.

Broad range of historical and cultural sources reflect
diversity and inclusivity and full world stage

Student centric

Subjective response followed by objective analysis

Scrutinized “local” meanings and judgments made
from weighing multiple pieces of evidence

Interdisciplinary in scope with “plural narratives.”

Idea based

Custom tailored

Distributed (as in distributed cognition and distributed networks)

Thin slicing of schedule to accommodate different
learning styles, pacing, individual needs

Multiple identities, empathy with other points of
view. Recognition of art’s social responsibility,
art’s formal autonomy, art’s polity.

Collective intelligence

Multi-modal with the ability to follow the flow of stories
and information from multiple sources and modalities

Emphasis on “negotiation” requiring appreciation of multiple
vantage points and “relational aesthetics” (e.g., Bourriaud)

Multiple contingent possibilities

Distributed, democratic

blog

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Conclusion

It was clear from day one of Stage One that both theoreticians and practitioners are actively exploring new constructs and dimensions that fall well outside the traditional foundation curriculum. Most striking is the shift from a discipline-specific orientation (which stresses only the elements and principles and an “art for art’s sake” perspective) to broad-based interdisciplinary approaches. Foundation teachers embracing these new directions share a renewed commitment to students and work to provide them the tools they need to successfully engage the challenges of contemporary life. This does not mean jettisoning the lessons of the Bauhaus or running head-long towards a “post-studio” curriculum. However, it does mean working hard to adjust to a new center of gravity and finding ways to bridge from foundation programs to the educational institution as a whole and to the community at large.

The Stage One team offered no simple recipes; however, it did, in effect, compile a compelling list of “predictors for success” for the 21st century artist. There was agreement that grounding in the history of visual culture and developing a capacity for critical thinking are essential. There was unanimity regarding the importance of acknowledging diverse identities and embracing multiple points of view. Much discussion centered on the importance of inquiry, the necessity of thoughtful risk-taking, and the need for students to trade short term effects for long range goals. Technology was seen as a given, not a “what if?” After all, computers and the internet are now as much a part of the artist’s experience as color mixing and gallery exhibitions. Beyond the perception of digital media as simply one more tool, there was an awareness that our increasingly networked and interconnected lives demand artists and educators who can help shape the nature of these dynamic experiences. It was suggested that the “participatory frameworks” made available through new technologies enable a shift and expansion of the “elements and principles” that have largely defined our *métier* for so many decades.

Both Stage One and Stage Two participants benefited enormously from the “participatory framework” of the Think Tank learning community. Many people contributed long hours and hard work to make Think Tank—and this article—a reality. The team is deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute time and ideas to such an important and rewarding set of experiences.

STAGE 2: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Stage 2 included workshops on curriculum design, assignment construction, and methods of critique plus discussion of leadership strategies and departmental dynamics. Extensive slide presentations from the first-year architecture program at Auburn University and distribution of the 130-page Teachers’ Manual from Florida State University provided participants with a rich archive of practical information.

Participants in Stage 2 included winners of the new *ThinkTank Emerging Educator Fellowship*, four Stage 1 participants who remained for Stage 2, and workshop facilitators Cynthia Hellyer-Heinz, David McLeish, Rusty Smith, and Mary Stewart.

The emerging educators wrote or revised an assignment for one of their courses, and on the final day of the event, presented these assignments to the entire group. The two primary goals of this collective process were 1) to reflect on the theoretical challenges of developing a curriculum with relevance in the 21st century and, 2) to develop concrete foundations assignments that moved well beyond the tried and true “elements and principles” approach to art and design education.

For clarity and convenience, this report is divided into the following parts:

1. From Mission to Outcome: A Concise Guide to Curriculum Construction;
2. Sample Assignments written by Selena Kimball, Brent Thomas, Mary Magsamen, and Anthony Fontana;
3. A Change-Agent’s Checklist.

In this section, we will explore relationships between a departmental Mission Statement, Curriculum Chart, Course Objectives, and Assignment Objectives.

Step 1: Developing a Mission: What, When, How and Why

What IS a Mission Statement, and when should one be written? A departmental Mission provides a concise statement of purpose. In it, members of an academic unit determine what they want to achieve, why these goals are important, and what effect they hope to have on students. Since the Mission Statement provides essential targets, it should be written as soon as a distinct academic unit is created. And, it should be revised whenever a substantial shift in direction is undertaken.

Why is a clear Mission Statement important? Without a shared sense of mission, members of the unit tend to work at cross-purposes, squandering time and effort. The Mission Statement provides focus, and a realistic Mission increases credibility.

How can the Mission Statement be written most effectively? A small committee, representing major constituencies with the department or school, can do the initial work. And, reviewing examples from comparable programs can provide a springboard more discussion. Typically, a Foundations Program Mission consists of three parts:

- A one-or two- sentence statement of purpose;
- A brief philosophical discussion that describes the context or unique values of the program;
- A list of essential targets, generally described as “outcomes.”

In our discussion, the Florida State University Foundations Mission Statement was presented as an example:

MISSION:

The Florida State University Art Foundations Program will provide beginning art students with the fundamental skills, knowledge, and experiences essential to their further development as visual arts professionals.

PHILOSOPHY:

In the Foundations Program, students will be encouraged to expand their technical skills, develop their critical judgment, explore interdisciplinary connections, refine their personal goals, and increase their understanding of contemporary art and design. Inventive concepts will be used to fuel development of compelling compositions and constructions. The Foundations curriculum will provide the basis on which the BA and BFA programs can be built in the Department of Art and will also provide fundamental coursework for the BS in Art Education.

OUTCOMES:

Upon successful completion of the Art Foundations Program, students will have achieved:

- *An ability to develop and solve visual problems using a variety of ideation strategies;*
- *An ability to transform ideas into images, objects, and actions using a wide range of art materials, methods, and processes;*
- *Effective concept visualization using the elements and principles of design;*
- *A capacity to think critically, and write and speak clearly about the visual arts;*
- *Knowledge of contemporary visual experience in art, design, and the kinetic arts;*
- *A work ethic that reflects integrity, teamwork, dedication to personal growth, social responsibility and the confidence to take risks*

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Step 2: Charting your Curriculum

Creating a simple graph can help you see connections among the various courses in your curriculum. Outcomes are listed in a column on the right, while the courses taught are lined up along the top. Then, simply fill in the resulting boxes. In what courses and by what means are the outcomes being presented? If you wind up with an overload of information in one area and an absence of information in another, there is a mis-match between your Mission and your curriculum. In that case, either the Mission or curriculum needs to be revised. An excerpt from Florida State can serve as an example:

OUTCOMES	DRAWING I	3D DESIGN	SUCCESS STRATEGIES	2D DESIGN
Ability to develop and solve visual problems using various ideation strategies	expansion of in-class projects through inventive homework assignments	work with at least 3 ideation strategies, such as idea maps, distillation, and collaboration	lectures will include discussion of ideation strategies used by artists and designers	work with at least 3 ideation strategies, such as convergent, divergent, and metaphorical thinking
An ability to creatively translate ideas into art images and objects using a wide range of art materials, methods, and processes	work with graphite, charcoal, conte and ink, rendering of basic forms, work with one- and two-point perspective	work with additive and subtractive processes using wire, board, wood, and plaster, effective use of band saw, drill press, sanders, lathe, and basic hand tools	lectures will include discussion of materials, methods, and processes used by artists and designers	work with markers, collage, acrylics and other materials
Effective concept visualization using the elements and principles of design	Use of negative and positive shape interaction, focus, emphasis and balance	Work with line, plane, volume, mass, texture, balance, scale, and proportion	lectures will include discussion of compositional choices made by professionals	Extensive visual and verbal vocabulary building, providing a solid grasp of elements and principles
A capacity to think critically, and write and speak clearly about the visual arts	spoken and written in-class critiques, using formal analysis, compare and contrast, alternatives, and other strategies	spoken and written in-class critiques, using formal analysis, compare and contrast, alternatives, and other critiquing strategies	Analysis of and experimentation with various critique methods; discussion of relationships between critical and creative thinking	In-depth discussions of idea expansion and idea distillation, with an emphasis on creating alternatives and making choices
Knowledge of contemporary visual experience in art, design, and kinetic arts	use of a wide range of visual examples when introducing new processes and materials	use of a wide range of visual examples when introducing new processes and materials	guest lectures by visual arts professionals will help students see the connection between their studio experience and career aspirations	use of a wide range of visual examples when introducing new processes and materials
A work ethic that reflects integrity, teamwork, dedication to personal growth, social responsibility and the confidence to take risks	minimum of four hours of weekly homework; use of appropriate deadlines; extended Final project	minimum of five hours of weekly homework; use of appropriate deadlines, collaborative project or at least one team critique	investigation of potential professions and development of personal goals	minimum of four hours of weekly homework; use of appropriate deadlines, one collaborative project or at least one team critique, extended Final project

Step 3: Constructing Each Course

Most Foundations Programs are taught by a large number of faculty members, often with widely ranging levels of experience. A clear and reasonable list of baseline objectives for each course can help provide essential structure while retaining a reasonable level of independent initiative. Too much structure results in bored and frustrated teachers; too little structure can be an introduction to chaos theory. The most experienced and inventive members of the program can expand well beyond the baseline targets. A sample list of course objectives follows.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Course Description: *Experience in designing and constructing expressive three-dimensional forms using a variety of materials and methods.*

Course Objectives: *Upon course completion, all students should be able to:*

- *Define and effectively manipulate the elements and principles of 3D design to create non-objective, abstract, and representational compositions;*
- *Use a wide variety of idea generation strategies confidently;*
- *Create projects that are structurally sound, using wire, board, wood, and clay;*
- *Use a band saw, drill press, sanders, and basic hand tools effectively;*
- *Speak and write critically about personal and peer artworks and propose alternatives*
- *Design and complete an ambitious personal Capstone Project.*

Step 4: Constructing an Assignment

For the emerging educator, turning personal studio experience into inventive assignments for freshmen can be a daunting task. The actions and compositional choices we take for granted may be totally foreign to beginners. A sense of purpose is essential: each assignment should advance the overall learning experience in a substantial way. The following checklist can help an emerging educator organize assignments and strengthen communication.

- **Title:** An inventive or memorable title immediately attracts attention.
- **Author:** Give your name, institution, and contact information.
- **Premise or Springboard:** What is the intellectual or aesthetic context for the assignment? What concepts will the students address?
- **Problem:** What will the students *do*? Describe the assignment in one or two sentences. Stick with essentials: details on why and how will follow in sections on objectives and strategy.
- **Objectives/Assessment Targets:** What new knowledge will students gain through this assignment? Three to five objectives are ideal. Consider including a variety of learning experiences, from technical and perceptual experiences to critical and conceptual thinking. This helps students gain multiple skills simultaneously. Objectives that lead to tangible results help with the assessment process: if there is no visual evidence of progress, it is hard to know what students actually accomplished. Thumbnail sketches, maquettes, and rough drafts expand creativity and provide evidence of ideation, so encourage their use.

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- **Materials:** List the tools, equipment and supplies needed.
- **Strategy:** How will the work be accomplished? When appropriate, identify the thinking processes, organizational methods, and in-progress deadlines. When an ambitious assignment unfolds through a series of steps, more ideas and variables can be addressed effectively.
- **Examples:** List 6-12 artists whose work is related to the assignment, or list recommended readings. Since freshmen generally know little or nothing about contemporary art, it is important to include recent as well as historical references.
- **Key Questions:** To expand critical thinking and increase personal responsibility, list three or four practical questions students need to ask themselves as they complete the assignment. Examples:
 - Experiment with wire, bristol board, and plaster gauze. Which material will best communicate your idea?
 - How can lighting enhance mood or expand meaning in your drawing?
 - What are the metaphorical implications of the objects you have included in your assemblage?
- **Critiquing Strategy:** Determine the type of critique best suited to the problem and work out the logistics. Using a variety of techniques throughout the term can increase student involvement.
- **Timetable:** As appropriate, determine due dates for various stages in the problem as well as the final deadline.

Step 5: Assessing the Results

A simple rubric can speed up the grading process and give students a clear sense of the areas of strength and areas needing more development.

NATURAL SELECTION ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC						Rating: 5 = highest
CRITERIA	1	2	3	4	5	COMMENTS
<i>Range of colors created</i>						
<i>Richness and inventiveness in color relationships</i>						
<i>Craft</i>						
<i>Eloquent translation of object into image</i>						
<i>Conceptual invention in final design</i>						
						GRADE:

The following three assignments, developed by fellowship winners, demonstrate ways to use this format. By inserting a “21st Century Scorecard” at the end of each assignment, we identify various aspects of the 21st century pedagogy proposed in Stage 1 of *ThinkTank 3*.

CREATING AN IMAGINARY MUSEUM

Selena Kimball, Hunter College and George Mason University, www.selenakimball.com

“I get everything that satisfies my soul from bringing together objects that are in the world, manipulating them, working with spatial arrangements, and having things presented in the way I see them.” -Fred Wilson

Springboard: Museums are powerful places, especially for artists. Here we have our first direct experience of the great works of art, and perhaps our first encounter with the artist as maker. Museum displays help us conceptualize and concretize our world and our history. In essence, creating a museum requires the formulation and presentation of a world. Museums often represent highly distilled and authoritative points of view.

Assignment:

Draw an imaginary museum. You are given unlimited funds, and can focus on any topic. What will your museum display, investigate, or preserve? Will it explore a theme, present a slice of history, or will it be purely fantastic?

Objectives/Assessment Targets

- Generate at least 20 answers to these questions: what is a museum and what can it become?
- Distill your ideas down to a well-organized 3-5-minute presentation, including sample images.
- Create a well-crafted drawing that adheres to the principles of one- and two-point perspective.
- Position your “collection” effectively in the space you have constructed.

Materials:

18”x24” Bristol paper, graphite pencils (B-6B), erasers

Timetable:

PART I: Due Week 6

We have learned to construct the illusion of space in drawing using one- and two-point perspective. Use these skills to draw a hallway in the Art Building. Work on your concepts as well, creating at least three sketches of ideas for your Imaginary Museum.

PART II: Due Week 7

Complete in-class hallway drawing. Now, the Imaginary Museum can be drawn in graphite directly on top of our in-class exercise.

Key Questions:

- Will you be altering the architecture (the walls, ceiling or floor) of the hallway itself to better suit the concept of your museum, or is your focus primarily on the display of objects themselves?
- Will you use traditional modes of display such as pedestals and dioramas or seek alternate means of exhibition?
- How can lighting enhance mood or expand meaning in your museum?

Lecture Examples: Wunderkammer, the curiosity cabinet of the 17th century, Athanasius Kircher, examples of traditional museum displays, David Wilson’s “Museum of Jurassic Technology”, Museum Practice of Fred Wilson, Mark Dion’s “Bureau of Surreal Investigation.”

Recommended Reading: Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder, Lawrence Weschler

Critique Strategy: At the beginning of class, each student is given the task of acting as “expert critic” for the work of another student. They write notes about their assigned artwork during the first twenty minutes of the critique. The results then serve as a springboard for the full class discussion.

21st Century pedagogy SCORECARD:

Historical references, multiple possible solutions to assignment, hybrid of traditional fundamentals and deeper critical responses, cooperative learning principles employed through individual presentation and through critique, recommended reading.

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SEEING MORE BY GOING BLIND

Brent Thomas, the_nordic_one@hotmail.com, West Virginia State University

Springboard: In its most essential form, what is drawing? What is the relationship between drawing and experience? How can visual and verbal information help one to empathize with the viewpoints of others?

Problem: Complete six blind contour drawings of your neighbor and of others in the class. Once completed, add text in the form of conversations to expand the emerging narrative. This assignment is presented on the first day of class, as an ice-breaker and skill-builder.

Objectives/Assessment Criteria

- To demonstrate an understanding of linear nuance;
- To use repetition, rhythm and overlap to create an engaging composition;
- To record a compelling moment in time, using visual and verbal information.

Materials: Drawing Pad, Ball Point Pen or markers, scotch tape and other materials, as time allows.

Strategy: Without looking down, draw your neighbor while facing each other. Don't worry about resemblance: blind contours rarely offer that level of control. At this stage, we are focusing on the line as expression more than line as representation. Lay out all of your studies, and begin to look for possible connections. Will adding or deleting lines create a more coherent composition? What connections and disruptions can you create in the drawing?

Next, record a number of compositional fragments as you listen to conversations around the room. Using the resulting text, begin creating a dialog between the drawn characters and the viewer. Add or subtract lines and dialog as needed to create a composition that is both engaging and unified.

Key Questions:

- Since the drawings are *not* highly representational, what will make them successful?
- Why did you include certain conversational fragments while deleting others?
- What relationship between words and images best captures your experience of the first day of class?
- If you had a month to devote to this type of study, how expansive could it become?

Timetable: The drawing and recording of conversations will be completed in class. The text and final composition will be completed as homework.

Examples: Begin with references to "Automatic Drawing" practices used by the Surrealists, including Andre Masson and Yves Tanguy. "Picasso's drawing with a flashlight" will also add insight to this lesson. Other masters of line include James Surls, Henri Matisse, Ellsworth Kelly, and Ceren Oykut.

Recommended Reading: "Exactitude is Not Truth" by Matisse, from *Theories of Modern Art*.

Critiquing Strategy: Critique the same way as the assignment was completed. Pair students up one by one, have them study the composition, then critique the work together, on a more personal level. Refer back to the Key Questions (listed above) and provide additional questions as needed. Without some guidance, students at this level typically exchange pleasantries instead of objectively addressing the artwork.

21st Century Scorecard:

Empathy with another point of view, historical references, multiple possible solutions to assignment, focus on process as well as product, interdisciplinary connection between word and image.

VISUAL EPITAPH

Mary Magsamen, University of Houston, marym@maryandstephan.com

Epitaph: a brief poem or other writing in praise of a deceased person.

Springboard: Think about how you perceive yourself, how others perceive you, and how you want to be perceived. Go beyond superficial definitions of who you are. Consider the significance of your actions, interests and decisions: what do they tell us about your character? Feel free to embellish your life. It can be fictional or real. The book can be a self-reflective documentary or an alternative vision. Consider the distance in space and time between yourself as artist/author and the deceased.

Problem: Create a small book that visually and conceptually defines your life.

Objectives/Assessment Targets:

- Expand your digital imaging skills;
- Use post-printing manipulation to expand meaning;
- Create at least three narrative alternatives, using different approaches to image sequencing;
- Identify major themes and pivot points in a personal narrative;
- Effectively incorporate text as a visual and conceptual component of the work.

Technical and Material Requirements:

- Print at 300 dpi
- 4-8 pages in length; 5" x 5" trim size (dimension of each page)
- Maximum of 150 words
- Evidence of post-printing manipulation: drawing, sewing, painting, layering or cutting.
- Use Photoshop, Illustrator and/or In-Design

Strategies: This is a small book that chronicles or encapsulates your life. Use metaphors and symbols to describe abstract ideas rather than literal interpretations. Think of nouns, adjectives and descriptive verbs. Rather than saying "She was a dancer" and then putting a pair of dance shoes on the paper, think about what dance has meant to you, and how to show this most effectively. Text and layout will play an important role in this project; so think about how you can use text as information as well as design elements.

As you create the individual pages, consider how the pages will work once you have joined them together as a book. Consider using visual elements such as line, shape, color or texture to help create unity. Consider the advantages of a codex binding, an accordion structure, or other methods of construction. The structure itself can dramatically expand meaning.

Key Questions:

- What does your book say about you (or your character)?
- How would you describe your personality (quiet, loud, fun, energetic)?
- How can textures add to your idea?
- How do the pages connect and hold together (physically and compositionally) as one piece?

Examples:

- Historical Scrolls: Egyptian, Japanese, and Christian
- Identity: Cindy Sherman, Anthony Goicolea, Hannah Wilke, Elizabeth King,
- Process/Materials: Fluxus Art, Starn Twins, Christian Boltanski

Critique Strategy: Students are broken up into groups of 3 or 4. Each group gets books from students in other groups. They discuss and make notes together and then present their critique to the class. The notes are given to back to the students for their reference.

21st Century Scorecard:

Numerous historical and non-western cultural references; fresh contemporary voices; multiple possible solutions to assignment; cooperative learning principles employed in critique.

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Anthony Fontana, Visiting Assistant Professor at Bowling Green State University, wrote the final example. A participant in Stage 1, Fontana's assignment demonstrates the use of multiple steps to expand the ideas presented while simultaneously retaining a strong emphasis on the "basics."

THE STORY OF THIS PLACE

Anthony Fontana, Bowling Green State Universityafontan@bgnnet.bgsu.edu

Springboard: Setting is one of the most complex and compelling aspects of narrative. We immediately respond differently to a bustling street corner at rush hour and a quiet street corner at dusk. Context changes meaning.

Problem: To create a representational image that recalls a childhood place or dream.

Compositional Objectives:

- To manipulate **figure ground reversals**
- To create a series of inventive relationships among shape, texture, and font;
- To create a composition that has a **foreground, middleground,** and **background** relationship;
- To use **value pattern, value contrast** and **lighting** to expand meaning

Conceptual Objectives:

- To explore the psychological and associative implications of setting
- To explore memory as a source of ideas

Creative Objective:

- Exploration of multiple solutions at each stage in the process

Suggested Readings: *The Art of Watching Films*, Chapters 3 and 5, *Launching the Imagination*: Chapters 1 & 7.

Materials: illustration board, acrylic black and white paint, paintbrushes, pencils, pen, sketchbook, and your ability to take risks

Strategy:

Step One: Art:21 Place & Stories

- Watch the Art:21 episodes: *Place and Stories* and answer the worksheet questions on your blog.

Step Two: Recalling a place, dream, story

- In your Journal make a list of 15 different places you remember from your childhood. These places can be real or imagined. Think about the story that goes with each place. Pick two and describe all the objects and people that occupy it. Think about a situation or event that occurred there. Write each story out in your journal. What objects in this place belong to the place itself and which belong to your story?
- Research: If a picture of this place or something like it is available, find it. If people are going to occupy this place get photographic reference or draw studies from real people. Every object will be important, so use references as necessary. Pay special attention to texture, local value, and scale.

Step Three: Tell the story

- Next, begin to draw the place. Each composition should have a deliberate foreground, middleground, and background.
- Pay special attention to where you place the objects that help tell the story. How will viewers create a narrative from what they are given?
- Now, add 1-8 words from your written story to aid the viewer in creating this narrative. How does word placement and typestyle affect the overall meaning?
- Seek the evocative and avoid the literal. *At least one word must use figure ground reversal.* [Example: If white text on a black ground crosses onto a white ground then the text must change value.]
- Do preliminary sketches in your sketchbook to explore cropping and "camera" angle.
- Draw one sketch to be used for the final in ink pen. Do not add value yet.

Step Four: Setting the mood

- Will the value contrast in your place be extreme or subtle? How will this place be lit? By daylight? Moonlight? Flashlight? Determine what kind of value structure will give your viewer a dramatic engagement with the piece and heighten meaning.
- *Make 5 copies* of your final draft sketch. Using a pen or pencil try shading each copy to make a different effect, subtle or extreme.
- Then transfer your drawing onto an 8"x 10" piece of illustration board. Paint the value using black or white acrylic paint, mixing to achieve gray.
- What stylistic approach is best? Will you separate each value into a shape like paint-by-numbers, or will gradation work better for your idea?
- Beyond basic assignment parameters, what else can you do to create the most compelling project possible?

21st Century Scorecard:

Balance between context, concept, and composition; multiple-step ideation; extensive visual and verbal research, interdisciplinary connections, and narrative.

Figure/ground reversal: an arrangement in which positive and negative shapes alternatively command attention. Also known as positive and negative interchange.

Value: 1. the lightness or darkness of a color 2. the relative lightness or darkness of a surface.

Value contrast: the relationship between areas of light and dark. General contrast values between joined areas are termed "low-value", "mid-value", and "high-value". Theoretically, between white and black there could be an almost unlimited number of values. When value contrast is minimized, the range of values creates a subtle effect. When the value contrast is high, the effect is more "high-contrast" or dynamic.

Value pattern: this is the arrangement and the amount of variation in light and dark areas. By adjusting the number of values, contrasts, and patterns, will affect the emotional feel of a painting or design.

COMPOSITION AND CRITICAL THINKING

Before arriving at *ThinkTank3*, Stage 2 participants were asked to read a twenty-five page "primer" developed at the conclusion of *ThinkTank 2* in 2007. The full text of this primer is available on the ThinkTank blog at www.thinktankarts.typepad.com. The following excerpt can help instructors engage students more fully in idea generation and selection.

Excerpt from Critical Thinking Team Report, *ThinkTank 2*, June 2007

Definition: At the Foundations level, Critical Thinking is the ability to define a problem, collect relevant data, recognize and prioritize choices, and justify a selection.

Significance: Critical thinking creates a dialogue between "what is" with "what can become."

It requires students to

1. analyze and deeply understand an existing question or condition;
2. provide a sound basis on which alternatives are developed.

On an individual level, critical thinking requires meta-cognition—the understanding and expansion of our own thought process and decision-making ability. In a collaborative context, critical thinking helps us move from a solitary viewpoint to ideas that can be shared.

Process: Critical thinking requires an active process of inquiry. A common eight-step process is listed below. When the problem is complex or its definition is elusive, this cycle of investigation may need to be repeated numerous times.

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Active Listening & Observation

Active listening involves concentrating on what is heard and what it could possibly mean. Observation requires using all the senses to take in the current situation, without immediate judgment. As critical thinkers, we seek to understand the puzzle being presented and to explore its constituent parts.

Asking Appropriate Questions

Appropriate questions clarify the problem at hand and illuminate its implications. When presented with a problem, students may need to ask very prosaic questions like:

- What are the limitations in size, materials, or subject matter?
- Can the problem be done collaboratively, or must it be done solo?

They may also need to understand what is not included in the problem. For example, a non-objective design will *not* include a drawing of a house.

Maximizing student engagement expands learning. When we provide all of the answers, we discourage critical thinking. How we pose a question is also important. "Build a shelter" is a broader assignment than "build a house." "Create an artwork based on the word *shelter*" is broader still.

Develop an Initial Hypothesis

Through the questioning process, the student begins to develop a preliminary hypothesis, which is a proposition put forth as a possible solution without any assumption of its truth. Thumbnail sketches are an excellent means of creating a visual hypothesis. In effect, we propose a solution in each sketch we complete.

Gathering Relevant Information

Critical Thinking relies on basic three types of research to expand understanding.

- observational research focusing on physical evidence or specific behavioral;
- periodical or literary research is reviewing what has been written or designed by others;
- ethnographic research focuses on larger cultural issues that give meaning to behaviors and artifacts.

For the artist and designer, Critical Thinking may involve many forms of visual research.

Consider the following assignment:

Create a black and white design using different forms of texture to create the illusion of space and the illusion of motion.

For such an assignment, students might employ the following forms of research:

- Make rubbings from bricks, wood and other physical materials;
- Experiment with stippling and cross-hatching as textural means of creating the illusion of space and the illusion of motion;
- Look at examples of work by such artists as Lichtenstein, Magritte, Man Ray.
- Look at uses of texture in Maori wood carving and tattoos.

Sort Information and Prioritize Possible Solutions

Listening, observing, questioning and visual experimentation creates data that may not be immediately relevant. We now may need to step back to organize our data, review the initial problem, and prioritize our options.

Test Possible Solutions

Thumbnail sketches, "funky-junky" three-dimensional maquettes and multiple digital variations are all excellent ways to test solutions.

Evaluate Results Based on Deeper Understanding of Initial Question

Our understanding of the initial question constantly evolves as we seek a solution. Thus, our evaluation of results at this stage should go beyond our initial bare-bones understanding.

Finally, to retain what we have learned, it is also important to add an eight step, as follows.

Self-Reflection: Fitting New Understanding into a Personal Framework

We all solve problems using a mix of prior knowledge and new knowledge. By recognizing our existing strengths, listing additional skills we need, and actively developing new skills as necessary, we develop meta-cognition and become active learners.

Implications of Critical Thinking for Foundations Teaching

Critical thinking encourages students to challenge their assumptions, move beyond their previous successes, and take responsibility for their choices. They learn to slow down, question assumptions, invent alternatives, and make informed decisions. And, when connected to collaborative thinking, critical thinking tends to expand self-awareness. By considering alternative viewpoints, we become more attuned to similarities and differences in our own work. Self-awareness can generate a heightened understanding of personal responsibility while at the same time increasing independence.

A CHANGE AGENT'S CHECKLIST

Stage 2 was designed to support "emerging administrators" as well as "emerging educators." To provide added information to both audiences, we included a discussion of leadership on our final afternoon. The following checklist was written in response to this conversation.

Take Charge

When you begin a new administrative job, the faculty you were hired to lead generally wants you to succeed and is willing to offer extra support. This "honeymoon period" may last as long as a year; more commonly, it lasts for one semester. Use this time well: it will set the stage for your tenure as a whole. If the immediate needs are obvious (such as a flooded classroom), get the problem solved. If you need to gather information before taking action, begin a series of small group meetings as soon as you have a list of good questions. Be proactive.

Build Credibility

Students and faculty will follow a leader they find credible. Deans and provosts will support a leader they find effective. Credibility increases effectiveness. Sources of credibility include honesty, generosity, optimism, consistency, an even temperament, being organized, and following through in promises made.

Keep your head in the clouds and your feet on the ground. Managers maintain existing systems. Leaders invent new systems that can be effectively implemented. To make progress, a balance between vision and practicality is necessary.

Develop Shared Values

If your vision and values are essentially aligned with the vision and values of your subordinates and superiors, you will be able to move ahead quickly. If there is a serious difference in vision and values, change will occur much more slowly. You will need to take the time to learn what your constituents value and why. They will need time to see the benefits your vision may bring. Everyone will have to make adjustments if progress is to be made.

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Realize That You Can't Do It Alone

If you are leading a fairly small program or department, it may seem more expedient and effective to do everything single handedly. Any time you share responsibility, you have to:

- Understand what you really want done.
- Identify someone who is willing and able to do it.
- Describe the job clearly and set a deadline.
- If it is a busy faculty member you are working with, remind him or her of the deadline.
- Meet to review the results.
- If it is a major project, revise and re-do as necessary.

Even though it seems like a clumsy and extended process, shared responsibility is essential. If the needs are great, you can't do it alone, no matter how hard you work. There is simply too much to be done. More importantly, by sharing responsibility, you share control, increase faculty support, and expand your own vision.

Lead By Example

If you want teamwork, act as a team member as well as acting as a leader. Listen, take notes, and ask good questions when a colleague offers advice. If you want support, support your colleagues. Attend visiting artist lectures your colleagues arrange, and attend openings whenever possible.

Stay focused and even-tempered, even when an argument occurs, especially in a faculty meeting. Often it is your professionalism people remember, not the substance of the argument.

Don't Get Stuck

Don't become fixated on a failing strategy. If a cherished plan just doesn't work, return to the original problem and devise plan B. Don't get stuck in personal conflicts. If a colleague just isn't willing or able to go where you want to go, shift your attention elsewhere: there are many other jobs needing attention. Most importantly, don't get 'stuck' on yourself. An administration job is essentially a service to the community: it is done for the sake of the students, the faculty, and the school as a whole. Conviction and self-confidence are necessary; egotism is unnecessary and generally destructive.

When in Doubt, Over-Communicate

The following checklist is distilled down from notes developed by David McLeish.

- *Avoid separations into them and us.* There is rarely a single the deciding factor in reaching a decision. When we keep score or try to dominate the discussion, competition creeps in, and fear and doubt are soon to follow.
- *Connect, rather than compete.* The difference between "Yes, BUT" – and "Yes AND" is crucial. "Yes, BUT" seems to imply that the initial idea is not worthy. "Yes, AND" gives us a way to build on the initial idea.
- *Where appropriate, let go.* Facilitating rather than orchestrating a discussion expands the range of solutions. Realize that no single person has "all the answers" in a group discussion.
- *Everything is valuable.* Everyone knows that a sense of humor is needed in any group dynamic. But the ability to cry together is also something worth respecting. Allow time for rage or sorrow, as the situation requires.
- *Communication requires listening as well as speaking.* Sometimes, silence is the best response. Nurture your silent thinkers – they have so much to offer, if given the space.

- *Celebrate wisely.* Recognize when members of a team have really gone above the call of duty and reward them in a way that is comfortable for them. Not everyone wants a tickertape parade.
- *Use every available means of communication:* email, spoken and written reports, and informal conversations around the water fountain and in the hall. Remember that listening is as important as speaking.

CONCLUSION

ThinkTank3 Stages 1 and 2 overlapped by two days, and all participants attended the final presentations given by Stage 1 teams. As a result, application of conclusions reached in Stage 1 to Stage 2 were more individual than official: we were still digesting ideas that had just been developed and presented.

We determined that individual instructors as well as entire programs should weigh each recommendation presented by the Stage 1 teams carefully. The final checklist of traditional and transformative approaches should also be reviewed. Strategies that best advance the mission of each program should be employed as quickly as possible: for the first-year student, the first-year experience is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity for intellectual and creative expansion and personal growth. Students need our very best ideas and approaches now, not five years from now!

Overall, *ThinkTank3* became a springboard for continuing conversation as well as a source for serious conclusions. The journey will continue with *ThinkTank4*, which focuses on Cross-Disciplinary Creativity.

Note

1 See *ThinkTank II* primer, titled "Teaching the Three C's," available on the ThinkTank blog.

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**Putting Theory to Work:
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for the 21st Century**

Appendix I: Participants in Stage 1

CONTEXTUAL CRITICAL CONNECTIONS:

THE ROLE OF HISTORY AND THEORY IN THE EDUCATION OF STUDIO ARTISTS

Participants: John Baldacchino, Columbia University, Teachers College (Facilitator)
Kristie Bruzenak, Savannah College of Art and Design
Joe Chesla, St Louis Community College at Meramec, Missouri
John Henley, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Marybeth Koos, Elgin Community College
Maurice Sevigny, University of Arizona
Richard Siegesmund, University of Georgia, Lamar Dodd School of Art
Amy Vogel, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

CONSTRUCTING MEANING: FROM IDEA TO OBJECT OR IMAGE

Participants: Peter Winant, George Mason University (Facilitator)
Cat Crotchett, Western Michigan University
Anthony Fontana, Bowling Green University
Bill Hill, Jacksonville University
Paul Hopkin, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Matt King, Virginia Commonwealth University
David McLeish, Florida State University

BEYOND COMPUTERS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND FOUNDATION TEACHING

Participants: Dan Collins, Arizona State University (Facilitator)
David Bogen, Rhode Island School of Design
Andy Hall, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Kitty Kingston, University of Wisconsin Colleges System
Bonnie Mitchell, Bowling Green State University
Julia Morrisoe, University of Florida
Joanne Stryker, Rhode Island School of Design

FINDING COMMON GROUND BETWEEN ART & DESIGN EDUCATION

Participants: Helen Maria Nugent, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Facilitator)
Cynthia Hellyer-Heinz, Northern Illinois University
Joyce Hertzog, Rochester Institute of Technology
Brooke Hunter-Lombardi, Columbus college of Art and Design
Adam Kallish, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
David Kamm, Luther College
Sheri Klein, University of Wisconsin-Stout
Jack Risley, Virginia Commonwealth University
Rusty Smith, Auburn University

Appendix II: Participants in Stage Two, with their position as of June 2007

Kjel Alkire, Adjunct Faculty, Arizona State University
Mariah Doren, Doctorate in Art Education, College Teaching Candidate, Columbia University Teacher's College
and Adjunct faculty, State University of New York, Purchase
Thaddeus Erdahl, MFA Candidate, University of Florida
Tom Ferrero, Adjunct Faculty, Indiana University
Hope Ginsburg, Assistant Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University
Magda Gluszek, MFA Candidate, University of Florida
Shannan Lee Hayes, MFA Candidate, State University of New York, Stony Brook
Cynthia Hellyer-Heinz, Foundations Coordinator, Northern Illinois University
Joyce Hertzog, Professor & Chair, Foundations Program, Rochester Institute of Technology
William Hill, Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts, Jacksonville University
Dawn Hunter, Foundations Coordinator, University of South Carolina
Brooke Hunter-Lombardi, Educ. Outreach Coordinator, Columbus College of Art and Design
Selena Kimball, Adjunct Assistant Professor, George Mason University and Hunter College
Jason Lee, Foundations Coordinator, West Virginia University
Mary Magsamen, Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Houston
David McLeish, MFA Candidate, Florida State University
Erin Obradovich, MFA Candidate, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Sara Pedigo, Assistant Professor, Flagler College
Rusty Smith, Associate Professor and Coordinator of First Year Program, Auburn University
Mary Stewart, Professor and Director of Foundations, Florida State University
Caleb Taylor, MFA Candidate, Montana State University
Brent Thomas, Assistant Professor, West Virginia State University
Angela Harden Wilson, independent artist, Atlanta, Georgia
Peter Winant, Associate Chair and Foundations Coordinator, George Mason University