people and performance

About **KNOWHOW**
Studio approaches to
teaching and learning

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This book is designed for reflection. Space has been created for the reader to add scribbles of notes and sketches of ideas. Through use, the book becomes both text-book and journal. Enjoy.

Above
An iconic image for KNOWHOW: the hands of the teacher perform the knowledge of an artist. Almost hidden are the hands of the student also performing their growing knowledge of an artist.

The Leonardo da Vinci Programme is an EU education programme that encourages the development and sharing of innovative learning and teaching.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme plays an important role in preparing European citizens for entering the labour market, thereby reducing unemployment. Taking companies' needs into consideration, the programme helps build a skilled European workforce in an increasingly competitive world.

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"Through participation students question. By deliberating and doing they become answerers."

(Margaret Macintyre Latta in Diaz and McKenna, 2004: 187)

Above
Students working with clay
Estonian Academy of Art,
Tallinn, Estonia

The artist–teacher and the performance of knowledge

Introduction

The concept of the artist–teacher is fundamental to the pedagogy of the art school studio. The practice of the artist–teacher varies from master and apprentices to mentor or even critical friend. Each is grounded in the communication of experiential knowledge through the demonstration of practice, anecdote and (in)formal curriculum. The concept of the artist–teacher lies at the heart of KNOWHOW.

Teachers/tutors who work in the art studios of higher education are often employed because of their contemporary status and practice as artists, designers or architects. It is commonly expected that tutors in art schools maintain a contemporary art practice in tandem with teaching duties. Thus the teacher's identity as artist is affirmed, often promoted, in their workplace. KNOWHOW is interested in the twin self-concepts of the teacher-as-artist and the artist-as-teacher, and in what value this self-concept might have for other teachers in other sectors and subjects.

"Now the teacher's own claim to rank as an artist is measured by his ability to foster the attitude of the artist in those who study with him, whether they may be youth or little children."

(John Dewey in Simpson et al., 2005: 201)

The identity of the artist–teacher is fascinating. It "is one in which three worlds must be straddled or interrelated: the world of art, the world of education and the world of art education" (Thornton 2005: 167). The pedagogical intentions of the artist–teacher are informed by these three worlds. Understanding the pedagogical intentions of the artist–teacher helps KNOWHOW discover how to facilitate creativity in educational situations beyond the studio. KNOWHOW agrees with Simpson et al. (2005: 20) that "the question is not whether we have artistic sensibilities, but whether we will support, cultivate, polish and use them."

In considering relationships between artist and teacher, we invite difficult questions: What can the artist teach us about teaching? How can the self-concept of the artist-as-teacher be useful to the teacher-as-artist? In this book of KNOWHOW we explore these issues through images of practice, the reflections of artist–teachers and quotations from other educational thinkers.

Above
Students and artist–teacher
International Ceramics Studio,
Kecskemét, Hungary

















Above and opposite page
Artist–teacher with artist–students
Estonian Academy of the Arts,
Tallinn, Estonia

Opposite page
Teacher professional development through the artist–teacher
Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Reflections from Margret Blondal

Artist and Teacher, Reykjavik

I consider my role as a teacher to be a stimulus as well as the person who tunes, turns and adjusts the whole assignment. Each class is different, depending on the students and the atmosphere. I always start with a simple assignment, but expand it as the class goes on. It is important to adjust the assignment to the class and the room, the light, the time of the day, what the weather is like, how many students there are, and so on.

The role is always the same, no matter what age the students are. It is to encourage the students, to persuade them the assignment is worth digging into, to create enthusiasm where the senses are vividly awake. The students need to be continually activated, so the teacher has to be aware how each is developing, be ready to give compliments, add an extra sprinkle on the subject, make a remark about interesting developments as well as critique. With young kids you don't need a long introduction to stimulate them —curiosity is still a fundamental drive. But my experience is that it doesn't take much to throw a spark into a group of students, no matter how old or experienced they are.

If the students are older, the vocabulary is more elaborate and one can fly off into philosophical matters. But stating that makes me realize that age is not what makes things more elaborate; rather it is experience or attitude.

The layout of the teaching space depends on the assignment. When I am still getting to know the students, I like to have them close together, around a big table perhaps, so it becomes clear to each and every one that he/she is participating individually, but also among other individuals where everyone is offering his/her own version. I like to be able to change the layout every once in a while, say with no tables and the paper on the floor. Some assignments require the students to stand, and it is important that there is enough space around everyone. If the room has a view, the space can be smaller.

This approach could work for teachers in various situations, but it is more difficult in the timeframe of the common school system. The teacher sees so many students every day and the school day is very long. In art school, the student enters a specific world—the moment he or she walks through the door, it is mentally a more open space.

The demand on the product is suffocating, though it is rewarding to see something you have been working on become. I also think that tactile connection with material without decorative purpose is essential. I emphasise the benefits of contemplation, to be able to stay still and dig into the subject matter. Restfulness is important to develop observation. I recommend making the assignment simple at first, but expanding the frame as the students get to work. I also encourage the student to leave some space for the mind to flow within the subject matter. Drawing is a good tool to develop one's vision and create a relationship to the subject matter.

Opposite page
Open studio, Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, United Kingdom

"Pupils are in danger of being liable to lose their knowledge of and contact with real material and how to work with it. With this, man might lose one of the intrinsic and unsurpassed values of the very nature of being human."

(János Probstner, International Ceramics Studio, Hungary, 2007)

This page and opposite page
Young students performing knowledge of skills and materials. Children's classes, Reykjavik School of Visual Art, Reykjavik, Iceland

Opposite page
Children's class
Reykjavik School of Visual Art,
Reykjavik, Iceland

Reflections from Sigríður Helga Hauksdóttir

Three-Dimensional Multi-Disciplinary Designer and Teacher, Reykjavik

I see my role as a teacher as the one to open up a door to the unknown: to introduce my students to some new experiences—new ways of thinking, materials, approaches and methods. I find it very important that students learn by doing, seeing, touching. It is even more important that they are free to experiment, to find out for themselves, to feel they have discovered things by accident, stumbled upon an answer or learned through making mistakes. I believe this kind of experience is the one that leaves the greatest impression. It is the most memorable and stays with the student forever.

When planning a lesson for the 3- to 5-year-olds, I'm very much aware that they are collecting experience, and I quite often consider what may not be available to them in their everyday environment: I try to come up with something they do not have chance to do regularly. Working with plaster or video are examples of things that 3- to 5-year-olds don't often do. A fresh look at a familiar thing can also be exciting when it is introduced as a new way of thinking: looking at the work of Andy Goldsworthy, an artist who arranges stones, twigs, leaves and numerous other things and photographs them in their natural settings, can bring playing on the beach to a whole new level.

I find this collecting of experience is the one thing that students of all ages have in common. When teaching 3- to 5-year-olds, I start the lesson with some kind of inspiration —for example, paintings in a book, the works of a particular

artist, a material or the view out of the window—and it is noticeable how little it takes to get them eager to start working: they seem to need little encouragement. Their curiosity level is very high and everything is so new, fresh and exciting for them. They sometimes get very impatient if this part of the process drags on too long, since instantly they seem to see where this is heading and cannot wait to start working.

It is also of some interest that the end results of projects within the lesson for this age are quite often similar to each other, probably due to the fact that they are at the stage of getting to know materials and processes. Time is also of consideration when teaching 3- to 5-year-olds. Time spent on each project can't be too long; one or two lessons seems to be best or their excitement dwindles fast. One way around this is to rest the project for some time and then bring it back in at a later stage with some twist or new approach.

When starting a new project with university students I use the same approach, starting off with inspirations and laying down the brief; but much more time and effort is put into this stage compared to a class of 3- to 5-year-olds. Older students are expected to work independently, do some further investigations on their own and find within the framework something that inspires them. This leads to very individual work: the end results vary a lot and are very different from each other. This first stage of the project can't be rushed; the outcome very much depends on the time given to it.

I have tried this approach with 9- to 12-year-olds with some success—and some steep learning curves for me. When this age group is asked to work independently, the key to success seems to be the set-up. A good experience for all requires considerable thought, time and preparation to be put into the immediate environment.

Above
Unexpected materials for creative learning

"I'm not an artist myself when I come here … that's impossible actually."

Urmas Puhkan 2005 (Estonian Academy of Art, Tallinn, Estonia)

Opposite page
Students and tutors
International Ceramics Studio,
Kecskemét, Hungary

I believe that the teaching methods used in the studio setting could be adopted by all kind of tutors teaching all kind of subjects.

I also believe that the most important part of this kind of teaching is to create an environment where students of all ages have a chance to discover things for themselves. The layout of the room, the materials, books and tools available, the examples that set the scene are all hugely important. This requires a lot of work from the teacher and therefore often becomes impractical.

The teachers have to feel challenged, creative and in control. This kind of approach cannot be forced upon people; the teachers must feel the need and the longing for a change. The school administration cannot simply decide that this is to happen and somehow expect the teachers to find a way to do it. This kind of approach has to come from within, and from the bottom up as well as from the top down. One way this could take off is if schools encourage and reward teachers who show ambitions in this direction, and make it possible for them to be exposed to best practices elsewhere. It is sad that so often good work goes unnoticed or unrewarded. Not many people are willing to work harder than needed if there is no appreciation for their effort.

When trying to answer the question what difference these approaches could make to teaching in the common school system, I find myself looking back at my own school days. The teachers that influenced me the most and fuelled my curiosity and thirst for more knowledge were exactly those teachers who employed this kind of approach in one way or another.

"Liberating pedagogies, wherever they take shape, most often are intended to enable learners to become different as they make increasingly adequate sense of their lived worlds."

(Maxine Greene in Diaz and McKenna, 2004: 23)

Opposite page
Icelandic student
International Ceramics Studio,
Kecskemét, Hungary

Above
Artist–teacher with a student
Reykjavik School of Visual Art,
Reykjavik, Iceland

"The teacher posits possibility, openness and alternative; the teacher points to what could be but what is not yet. The teacher beckons you to change your path, and so the teacher's basic rule is to reach."

(Ayers, 2002: 51)

Above and opposite page
Materials for creative learning can be found in everyday objects

Drawing and the communication of meaning





Discarded Drawings—Reflections from Bill Brown

Artist and Tutor, Glasgow School of Art, United Kingdom

In most workshops and studios you can find drawings left lying around, on scraps of paper, walls, tabletops or offcuts of materials. It is usually apparent they are neither doodles nor the sketches we might use for our own information in developing a piece of work. They often look a little careless, made with ballpoint pens, felt markers, blunt pencils. Sometimes they are clear depictions of objects or processes, but very often they seem a meaningless collection of lines, mysterious and difficult to interpret. These drawings have been made in the course of a conversation or an explanation; they are conversational drawings, left behind after serving their purpose. It is often clear they have been made with whatever implement came to hand, they are not meant to be important in themselves and they are meaningless without the verbal exchange that accompanied their making.

Above and opposite page
Explanatory drawings
Glasgow School of Art,
United Kingdom

"The tutor and students frequently used drawing to explain the meanings of their words. It was not uncommon to see people reach for a scrap of paper, the back of an envelope, and sketch a shape or outline a design. The following day I watched the tutor discussing the student's work and ideas so far. The tutor used the spare soft clay on the table to explain her words as she was talking. The shaping and reshaping of the clay happened in tandem with her words. The student responded using the same combination of changing the shape of the soft clay as she spoke."

(extract from researcher's field notes, March 2005)

The drawings recorded here were collected over a few months from workshops in the Glasgow School of Art, and comments were later collected from students and staff as a brief exploration of the role of drawing as a communication tool in studio learning and teaching. For most of us, this use of drawing is an everyday activity and accepted as a natural part of dialogue; the very fact that it is so commonplace must imply that the kind of conversation that takes place in the studio needs images as well as words, and that studio teaching involves a kind of dialogue that may be different from the tutor–student discussion found in most other areas of education. Looking at why and where these drawings were produced may help to define the special characteristics of learning and teaching in this context.

One reason for these drawings being made by teachers is obvious—it is often more effective to explain something visually. Students speak of reaching a quicker and clearer understanding of the work being discussed when issues are described visually as well as verbally: it "gives less opportunity for misunderstandings". The drawing—whether later discarded or not—also provides a visual memory of the conversation. This seems important for both teachers and students, and there is an understanding that a discussion of visual issues needs to be supported by visual information.

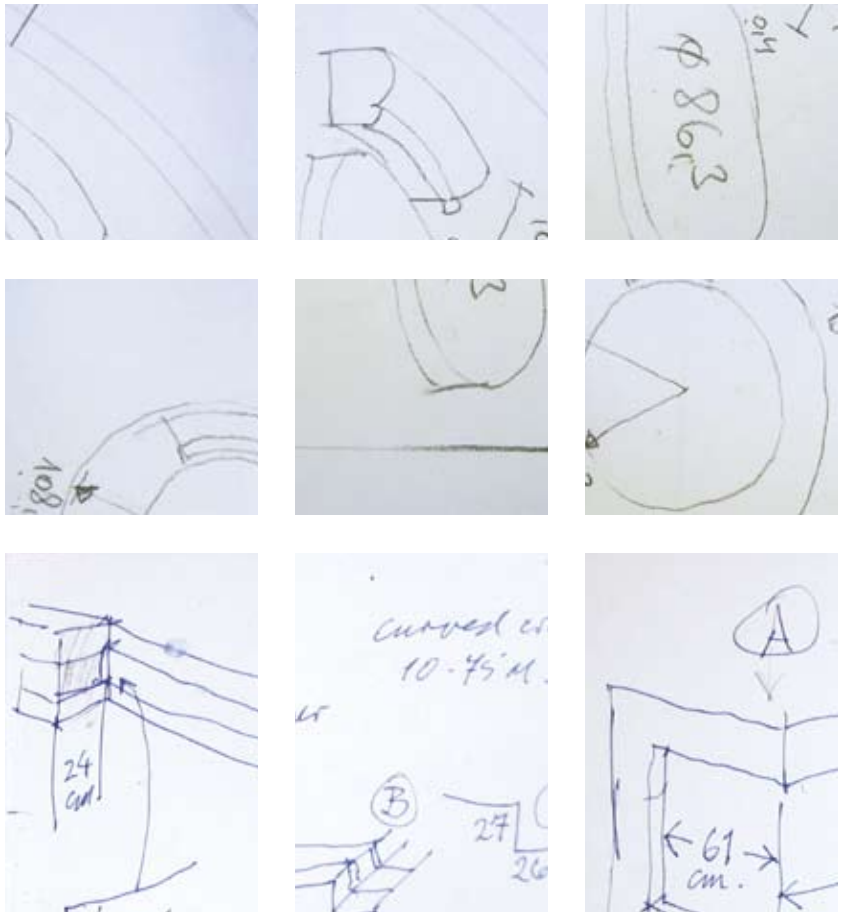
Often, however, tutor and student both contribute to the drawing and so the activity of drawing also provides a space for discussion:

"Many of the conversations … involve the pencil changing hands, pointing to bits where there may be a lack of understanding and confirming by both of us drawing the same thing—and if appropriate in the right order of events. There is often a change of ideas from both of us. I may have been shown a making complication which results in a design alteration, or the tutor will respond to the design request by trying to help resolve the making issues."
(Angela Pointon, student at Glasgow School of Art)

Discussion and clarification are often fundamental to learning and teaching in a studio or workshop. 'Teaching' implies a one-way passing-on of information to students, but teaching in this context is a much more exploratory process. Rather than trying to convey a specific piece of information, we are often trying to help the student reach their own creative solution to a problem and we need to pass information back and forth in order clarify what that solution might be and how it might be realised. Both the student's and the tutor's opinions and proposals may need to be revised as the issues become clearer and the work takes shape visually. Making a drawing not only helps to clarify ideas, but also provides a place and a space for this to happen.

Perhaps it is for this reason that making these drawings on scraps of paper or on work-surfaces sometimes seems to be a deliberate choice. Even studio tutors who normally use drawing in a very ordered way, keeping neat and tidy sketchbooks to resource their own personal work, often opt not to use the clean and expectant surface of a new sketchbook page to make an explanatory drawing when talking to a student. The few seconds spent in looking for a suitable surface and a suitable drawing implement seem to be important as a preparation for the conversation, finding and preparing a neutral space for it to take place in and inviting participation.

The drawing made on a scrappy surface or in a piece of cheap, dog-eared, lined paper is more likely to be ownerless than the one made on a pristine white page. Choosing to draw on the tabletop means that the drawing will be temporary, but by using that surface we invite speculation and the choice of a neutral space acknowledges that neither the tutor nor the student actually 'owns' the process or the result. This choice of surface emphasises the place of the drawing as a means rather than an end: it is not an end product in itself, but a way of adding visual understanding to the conversation.



Above
Explanatory drawings
Glasgow School of Art,
Glasgow, United Kingdom

"If I had the opportunity, I would insist that every teacher (like every student) should have an opportunity to work with at least one medium, to mold, to carve, to detail, to embody feelings somehow. No matter what the degree of insufficiency, the very effort to say how it was, how it is, by means of words, to transmute a startling perception into an image, to express a feeling through an arrangement of chords, somehow brings us into the heart of the artistic-aesthetic. We may not succeed. We may not complete what we want to complete. But we know in some measure; and we rediscover what it is to move beyond; to question, and to learn."

(Maxine Greene in Diaz and McKenna, 2004: 26)

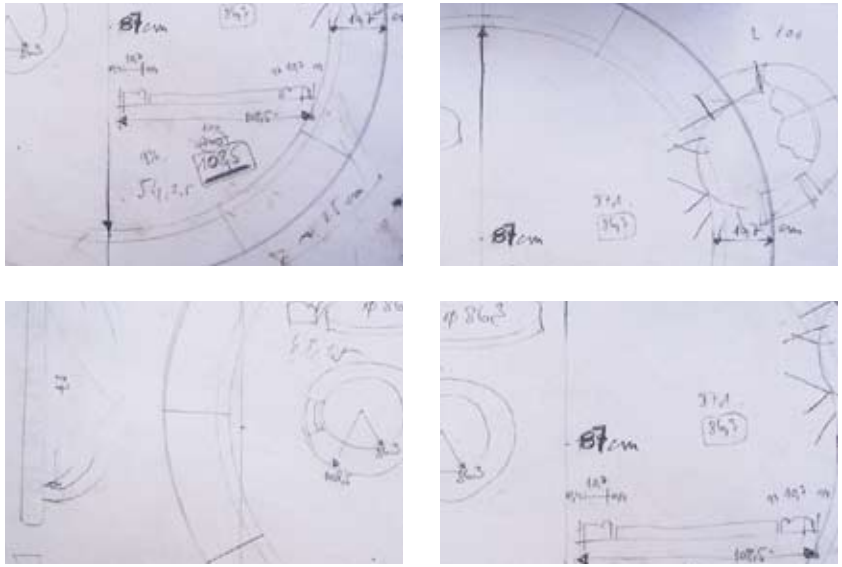
Studio teachers are a very varied group of individuals and even in a small sample of drawings the variety of style and content is easy to find. The style of the entire exchange, verbal and visual, is likely to be just as varied, and in a more thorough and systematic study of conversational drawings it is possible that patterns might emerge and we might learn something useful from them. Even after a brief investigation several questions come to mind. Most of us believe that male and female teachers, for example, have different styles of communicating, perhaps identify different areas for discussion or approach issues in a different way. Would we find these differences if we approached conversational drawings with a 'gender agenda'?

The drawings recorded here were all made during one-to-one conversations between a tutor and a student, sometimes with other students observing or listening in. Although most studio teachers will occasionally use drawing when talking to a group of students the intention is usually different, perhaps describing or illustrating rather than negotiating or discussing. The physical placing of the teacher, making marks on a board in front of the class, is very different from the dialogue over a drawing on the tabletop —less inviting of discussion or negotiation, more akin to a performance. Students are invited to be an audience rather than required to be participants. This is a suitable enough method for passing on some kinds of information, but it has severe limitations in helping students to reach their own individual solutions to problems of design or making. There are many different aspects to this kind of decision making in the workshop; technical complexities and aesthetic considerations have to be weighed up and the work modified as a result. When we are trying to help students to resolve these issues, then we are more likely to use drawing as an aid to clarity.

Some workshop activities need a lot of discussion. Many of these drawings were collected from the plaster workshop, perhaps to be expected since plaster-mould making is a process where there are many complications to explain and overcome. Intentions need to be clarified and the stages of making planned. It is possible, to some extent, to teach the principles of working with plaster by lectures and demonstrations, and it is also possible to learn a great deal about the process through watching other people work. These methods have their place, but to learn how to make decisions about the making process we have to learn about and actively participate in the thinking process that lies behind it. Many of the conversations that generate drawings on the workshop tables are about opening up and talking through that process: clarifying intentions, looking at alternatives, modifying ideas. The intention is not only to help the student make a mould, but also to help them to think like a mould-maker.

The drawing-and-conversation education model is probably not peculiar to art and design, but it is part of the evidence that a special kind of conversation takes place in our studios and workshops. This kind of teaching takes time; within the constraints of present-day education it can be hard to justify. Relating information to a large group of people in a lecture is undoubtedly a much more cost-effective way of 'delivering' a course. Is it realistic to spend a significant amount of time in one-to-one conversations when time is limited? On the other hand it has long been recognised that 'learning by doing' is effective learning, and when the 'doing' requires a creative combination of hand, critical and theoretical skills it is hard to see a better way of supporting this learning than by talking through the process—and drawing it—with the individual.

Opposite page
Explanatory drawing
Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, United Kingdom



"For those who have had only limited experience of working through periods of creative frustration … the temptation is to lose faith in the work and to turn instead to tried and tested paths of thought and production."

(Freeman, 2006: 97)

"We are all a material to work with.
Let us listen to the students and be
their assistants."

Sigurdur E Gudmundsdóttir 2005 (Reykjavik School of Visual Art, Iceland)

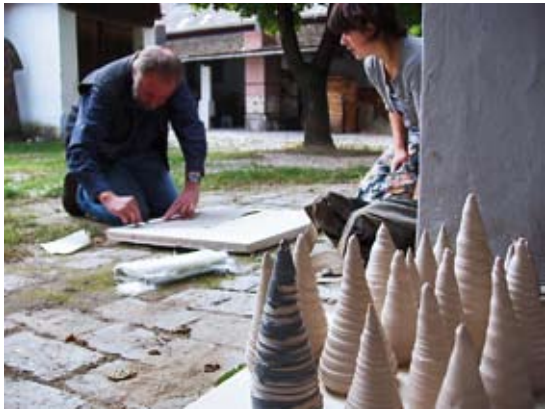
Above
Artist–teacher
International Ceramics Studio,
Kecskemét, Hungary

"Unless we can understand and articulate our distinctiveness we cannot conceptualize, assert or defend our identity because, simply, we have none."

Stuart Parker (1997: 157)

Above
Students from Estonia, Iceland and the United Kingdom International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemét, Hungary

Above
Tutors and students: International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemét, Hungary



"… if you look at teaching as a creative practice then what's wonderful is applying your creativity to new projects, new ways of delivering, new ways of demonstrating, new ways of actually getting students physically involved with what they're doing."

Steve Ogden 2005 (Cumbria Institute of the Arts, Carlisle, United Kingdom)

Opposite page
Artist–teacher demonstrating
International Ceramics Studio,
Kecskemét, Hungary

"artists taking on pedagogical roles as a natural part of their art practice characterize some of the most radical and innovative periods of art history."

Sullivan (2005: 158)

Above and opposite page
Hungarian tutor working with Glasgow students
Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Above and opposite page
Artist–teacher, International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemét, Hungary

"Whether activity or language is the central issue, the important point concerning learning is one of access to practice as resource for learning, rather than to instruction."

Lave & Wenger (1991: 85)

Above
Children's class
Reykjavik School of Visual Art,
Reykjavik, Iceland

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