

HELICOPTERS AND ART EDUCATION:
A PREFLIGHT GUIDE FOR NEW TEACHING ARTISTS

By

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Abstract

Although numerous studies exist that teaching artists can use to better their teaching (Saraniero, 2009; Upitis, 2006; Walker, 2001; Reeder, 2009; Hedberg et al, 2011), an approach is needed to address the complex issues that may arise in the transition from the studio to the classroom. This research relates how experts and professionals in different fields address pedagogical issues. My capstone project draws from research on teaching artists, my experiences as a photographer, and my knowledge as a helicopter instructor pilot to offer advice to artists who wish to teach. Specifically, I explore how *Naval Flight Training* uses professional pilots to teach students rules, regulations, systems, aerodynamics, and other subjects in a highly regimented curriculum. I use the aviation terms of pre-flight, flight, and post-flight as metaphors for teaching art to develop a guide for artists. In the guide, I provide three sample art modules to serve as an outline for new teaching artists when preparing for their first teaching experiences.

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Connecting helicopter instruction to art education may not seem congruent but when you compare how experts in each of these fields teach, there is no denying that we face some of the same challenges. With little to no background in formal education practices, experts and professionals tend to rely on how they were taught and how they learned instead of what is best for the student (Saraniero, 2009). At the same time, successful instructors seem to have an innate ability to assess students' needs and adapt their teaching style based on the students' current level and ability. The success of the instructor then, is dependent on their personal history with education and the amount of formal training they receive. To help alleviate this issue, the intent of this Capstone is to provide a model for artists with minimum education background to transition from being an expert in their field to being a successful and prepared educator.

Statement of the Research Problem

This Capstone project offers a framework to aid teaching artists who are transitioning to an educational environment for the first time. It is based on my experiences as an instructor pilot, my formal studies in education, and my experience as an artist. While resources and training exists for teaching artists to gain requisite experience before entering the classroom, the preparation is often short and focused on administrative and curriculum issues. While pedagogy, preparation, and experience are important, it is only part of the skill set teaching artists need and this project is intended to help highlight and explain these issues in a useful way. This Capstone resulted in an educators guide in PDF format that is published on my website and at www.issuu.com/bj.coffman.

Research Questions

The research questions that drive this project include the following:

- What should teaching artists know about education and the classroom environment before they enter the classroom?
- How can art professionals who do not have a background in education become successful teachers?
- What can teaching artists learn from how other trades who use professionals and experts as teachers?

Purpose of the Study

These questions come from my research on existing studies on teaching artists that address issues among teaching artists, classroom teachers, and administrators (Coffman, 2012). These studies address the fact that no formalized path exists from being an artist to becoming a teaching artist. Schools are increasingly using teaching artists to supplement their art curriculum but these artists are given little in terms of what to expect in the classroom, how to create a lesson plans, and the culture of the learning environment. This guide merges my experience as a helicopter instructor pilot and as a photographer and was designed to help navigate the art educational environment and aid new teaching artists as they enter the classroom.

Significance of the Study

As a helicopter instructor pilot, I am an expert and professional in my field. However, I received little training when it comes to managing the myriad of students' disparate learning needs. Teaching artists face similar issues concerning their training and resources about how to become a successful teaching artists and research shows that most of the issues with using teaching artists in the classroom center around their lack of formal instructional education (Hunt, Sanson, & Smerdon, 2009). These teaching artists rely on

how they were taught to inform their teaching and although this may or may not be a successful strategy, teaching artists are often not given specific training in classroom management and student needs (Saraniero, 2009). The amount of training and lack of formalized training becomes problematic when TAs enter the classroom because educators may not know their experience and skills with students. Although numerous studies and reports exist (Saraniero, 2009; Upitis, 2006; Walker, 2001; Reeder, 2009; Hedberg et al, 2011) that teaching artists can use to better understand their new role, this guide addresses the complex issues that may arise in the transition from the studio to the classroom.

The research is significant by relating how experts and professionals in different fields (aviation and art) address pedagogical issues. It brings together insights from art and aviation to supplement the lack of formal training for experts and professionals who teach. The lessons I have learned when forming how I teach as a professional pilot are developed and shared in this guide to serve professionals who are new to teaching in any field and is not limited to artists.

Limitations of the Study

There are numerous studies of teaching artists and how they relate to contemporary art education. This Capstone project is not intended to be comprehensive in its scope, but is limited to my experience as an instructor pilot and informed by the courses I have taken while working towards a Master's in Art Education. Although many professions use experts as teachers, this Capstone does not look at these professions or how they incorporate professionals into education.

Literature Review

The history of teaching art can be traced back thousands of years, and over time, art has been taught by craftsmen, artisans, through apprenticeships, and in the academies. Formal art education, though, has only existed in the classroom for a century and the relationship between education and the arts is relatively new considering the historical methods of teaching art such as apprenticeships, mentorships, and art academies. Institutions began to offer degrees in art education in the mid 19th century, focusing on pedagogical practices, theory, and classroom management (Daichendt, 2009). Since formalizing the field of art education in universities, art educators have been one of the most influential sources of teaching students about art.

Due to diminishing sources of state and federal funding in public schools, and the resulting refocusing of education resources on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), some districts have marginalized or cut the art education programs they once offered (Hedberg, Rabkin, Reynolds, & Shelby, 2011). As a result, a typically underutilized resource has emerged to fill the void in funding in the form of teaching artists. These professional artists make a living by making and selling their art while teaching in schools, communities, museums, and other settings. Their courses run for various lengths of time depending on the need of the organization. While most teaching artists have advanced degrees in art, they often lack a formal education in teaching. Despite this fact, they are becoming more prevalent in school systems and are, in most cases, an asset to the schools and students they teach.

Teaching artists are often seen as outsiders and feel isolated from mainstream education because they do not have the same education in teaching as their classroom

counterparts (Upitis, 2006). There has been only a small amount of information collected about who they are, why they teach, and the impact their presence has on art education. Eric Booth created the *Teaching Artist Journal* in 2003 to share information related to this field. Along with this journal, several other web sites have emerged to help people learn about becoming a teaching artist and to aid them in networking, offering professional development, and finding teaching opportunities (e.g., <http://www.arts.gov/>, <http://www.teachingartists.com/>, <http://www.teachingartonline.com/>, and <http://www.nyfa.org/>). Despite these resources, the relative amount of information for teaching artists is still minimal and incomplete because teaching artists have been a relatively underused resource in the past decades.

The research available focuses on three major issues within the field. The first issue is about the issue of *resources*, and the current research highlights issues teaching artists face regarding physical space, time constraints, funding, and networks. *Training* of teaching artists was also an important issue brought up throughout the research because they are often not required to have formal credentials or a teaching background to teach. Also, most teaching artists receive training in teaching by learning on the job or merely mirroring how they were taught. The third and last issue most frequently addressed was the role of *partnerships* with teachers, schools, communities, administrators, and funding sources. This highlights the need to create and mature partnerships with schools, administrators, teachers, and fellow teaching artists.

Resources

Resources are a main concern for teaching artists and encompass several different issues. While time and space are tangible concerns, monetary issues also play an important

role in how teaching artists are used. Many districts have been cutting funding for the arts, and funding for teaching artists often comes from grants and non-profits taking the fiduciary responsibility for incorporating the arts in school districts (Graham, 2009). Although sources for funding teaching artists in the schools varies between districts and regions, the research does not focus on where the funding comes from and how to obtain it, but rather offers a cursory overview of the issues regarding funding teaching artists. Accordingly, more studies are needed to ascertain how districts fund and incorporate teaching artists into their curriculum.

Training

The role of teaching artists has changed over time yet art education was not formalized until recently. Daichendt (2009) gives an overview of how teaching art changed and asserts George Wallis was the first person to identify both as an artist and a teacher of art. The role of the artists shifted, due to Wallis' influence, from sharing or teaching a craft to opening dialogues and discussions on how to create, what to create, and the meaning of creation. Though this created controversy at the time, universities began to offer courses on teaching art and the old pedagogies shifted to the craft of teaching not just the craft of art making. As artists reemerge in the classroom, their role in the classroom highlights some concerns regarding their training as educators. Saraniero (2004) argues that teaching artists have myriad of paths to teaching and different districts have different requirements regarding their training.

Partnerships

Arguably, the most important theme to emerge in this research was forming art education partnerships. In order for teaching artists to be used effectively, strong alliances

need to be made across communities, schools, and teaching artists need opportunities to come together as a group. Fogg and Smith's (2008) research study looked at integrating teaching artists in schools and the results clearly indicated that the overall scores in all subjects rose when art was an integral part of the curriculum. With empirical evidence from disparate sources highlighting the importance of art in the classroom and for students' achievement, teaching artists are uniquely situated to reinforce the need for the arts in education by showing the how arts are used in everyday life and bringing a level of expertise to the classroom.

Whereas the literature on teaching artists is minimal, it is even more difficult to find literature on professionals who teach such as pilots, professors, and tradesmen. There are many professionals and experts who in teaching positions, but little research has been completed into how successful they are, where they are used, and the amount of education training they have received. With teaching and learning being such integral parts of our society further research needs to develop an approach to assist professionals, such as artists, on how to integrate pedagogy with their current professional practices.

Methodology

I created a guide (www.issuu.com/bj.coffman) for this study which can also be accessed from my website (www.warehouse514.com). The guide begins by giving the reader an introduction to my experience and then exploring the history of teaching artists and the history of art education (See Fig. 1). Then I laid out the syllabus and training flow for Naval flight students in the advanced stage of helicopter training. Using the syllabus for flight instruction as a starting point and metaphor I refer to as preflight, flight, and post-flight. Each section has objectives for students as well as teaching artists.



Figure 1. Table of contents and introduction to the guide.

The preflight phase for the students and lays out the foundation of knowledge students will be expected to know before the teaching artist enters the classroom. This module focuses on technical knowledge, historiography of photography, and communication skills to prepare students for the lesson.

The preflight module for the artist focuses on their preparation and includes a pre-arrival syllabus. The module begins with visiting the classroom to get to know the culture of the school and the students, becoming familiar with *National Art Education Standards*, and assessing the level of knowledge students have regarding photography. This module focuses on the teacher becoming prepared for the environment they are about to enter so they can understand, prepare, and alter their lessons as necessary.

The flight module (see Fig. 2) proposes what the teaching artist will do in the classroom and incorporates a curriculum, project ideas, and a guide for what the teaching artists hopes to accomplish during their tenure. The flight module includes lesson plans, objectives, and activities for in the classroom. The flight module also incorporates where

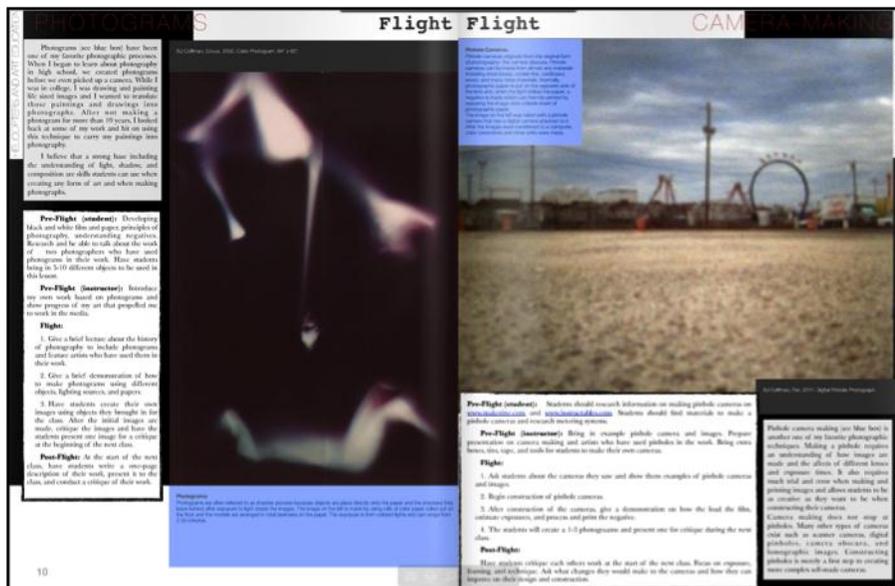


Figure 2. Flight Modules. Sample learning modules 1 and 2 from the guide.

lectures, critiques, and demonstrations take place to get the students involved in making art and exploring ideas.

The post-flight module (see Fig. 3) includes assessment, goals, and evaluation. While assessment is clearly the responsibility of the classroom teacher who is ultimately

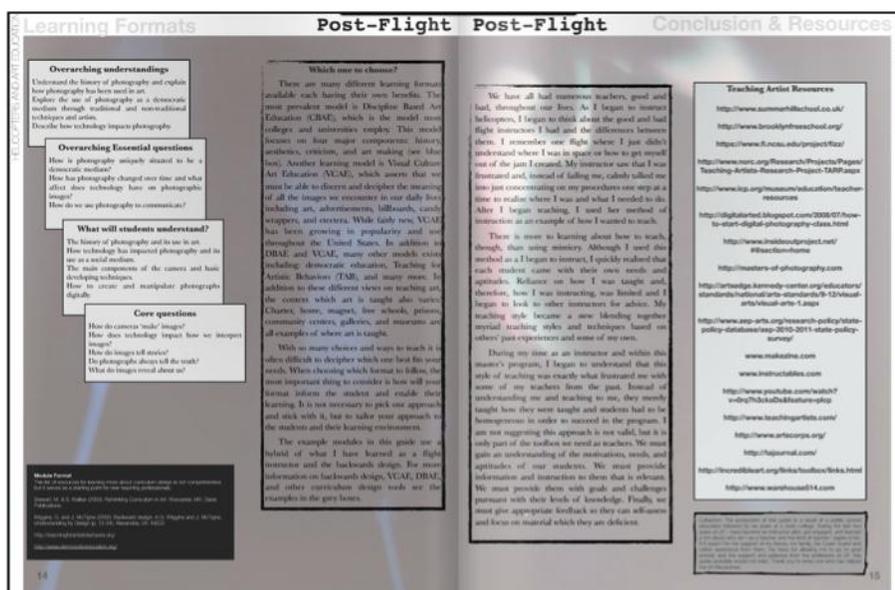


Figure 3. Post-Flight pages.

responsible for grading student performance, we, as teaching artists should realize the importance of assessment in determining whether or not the goals of the lessons were met. Another part of the assessment module is feedback and critique of and for the instructor so that changes can be made to the syllabus dependent on what worked well and what did not.

Limitations

The limitations of this project include basing the guide on my experiences with Naval flight students in a strictly regimented training syllabus and using that as a template for a disparate set of students in a different learning environment. The Capstone is also limited in that it only uses photography and aviation to develop the guide and its' modules. There are many other professions that have not been considered.

Findings/Discoveries

The goal of this research project was to create a guide for artist to use when entering an educational environment for the first time. My research on teaching artists, coupled with my experiences as a flight instructor, highlight issues experts and professionals face as new teachers. As more opportunities become available for artists to enter classrooms, the need for them to understand the structure of learning, the students' abilities, and classroom management is important, and this guide is to serve as a starting point for understanding the learning environment.

The typical model used in flight training, where it is often accepted that the expert knows best, is not necessarily the most effective approach to teaching. This results based method relies too heavily on moving the student along the syllabus and not on their capabilities. It is often forgotten that all students learn differently and have individual

learning needs. In this flight program, however, their needs are often neglected due to organizational needs. This singular focus on results can create a divide between experts and professionals and the students they teach. As a result, this guide was created to help show the differences in learning styles, aptitudes, and performance of the students and how we, as professionals, can better prepare ourselves to teach to every student.

As I was creating this guide, the need for experts and professionals to gain professional knowledge of education practices became evident. In my field of flight instruction, students often struggle with the course material or their ability to fly. Naval aviation is a serious business and requires a unique set of aptitudes and abilities to graduate. As a product of this system and as an instructor within it, I have discovered that some of the same educational issues apply to teaching artists. We are experts in our fields but not expert conduits of information. To serve our students better and to address their specific learning needs, even within this rigid learning environment, knowledge of pedagogical practices and techniques are important to impart information dependent on the student. The flight syllabus contains specific objectives and assessments and I have realized that students' understanding of content and skills is dependent on the instructor's abilities to communicate their knowledge.

One of the biggest mistakes, I think, we make as experts is to not think like students. We think linearly in terms of what we have learned over time. Students do not have the advantage of time and rely on their instructors to help them understand and use their knowledge in a productive way. Accordingly, my biggest discovery while developing this guide was to take a step back, understand where the student is developmentally, and provide a learning environment in the cockpit based on their abilities. In doing so, I can

intervene early to address deficiencies, set appropriate goals, and set my students on a path of success.

The Scope of the Guide

While writing this guide, I examined my role as an instructor pilot and the lack of training we receive as instructor pilots. Often, due to the lack of pedagogical training, we, as instructor pilots, often reverted to teaching how we were taught. This teaching style can be good or bad depending on our previous teachers but it often leaves out important strategies for effective instruction.

Writing this guide also led me to dig deeper into the flight instruction curriculum. This curriculum is comprehensive in scope to leverage the differences in instructors by clearly articulating a set of objectives and assessment rubrics to ensure the fair grading of students. Similar to the rubrics used in art education, the rubrics create a clear agenda for the student and the instructors. Without this specific agenda for both the instructors and the students, their training would be less standardized and merely dependent on those who assessed them. Hence, effective instruction is dependent on a comprehensive curriculum.

The Benefits to Students

This guide lays out forming a learning plan based on three principles of aviation, preflight, flight, and post-flight, to serve as a template for experts and professionals new to teaching.

While little research exists on professionals and experts who teach, my experience as a flight instructor suggests there is a large disparity between how each of us teaches. I believe this disparity is useful in that students learn a range of techniques and styles

necessary for a comprehensive education. However, when the differences focus on students' performance of their instructor styles in lieu of content, a disconnect can often occur. To alleviate this disconnect, we, as experts and professionals, must be able to modify our teaching to fit the student, not the other way around.

Final Reflection

The research I conducted on teaching artists shows a growing need for artists in the classroom as well as deficiencies in their training. My intent with this guide and research was not to show how to teach or what to teach, but to give ideas and include examples of how I would create a plan based on what I have learned as an instructor pilot to serve my students the best way I know how.

The first step in this process is to implement it and test it in a learning environment. In my area there are local schools, museums, and studios that can be used as settings to test out this guide and its curriculum. The next step affects my current job as a flight instructor. While this guide moves from flight instruction to art, it could also be inverted to show flight instructors how art education can help them become more effective instructors. Creating another guide just for instructor pilots could open doors to their understanding of education pedagogy. The final step, and one that will take some time, is to continue research on experts and professionals who teach. There are scores of trades who use their employees as educators in diverse environments. Finding out where, how, and when they are used is important so that we might be able to give these experts and professionals tools to benefit them and their students.

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Author Biography

BJ Coffman was born in New Mexico and grew-up in a military family. They moved every couple of years and he has lived in the Philippines, across the United States, and in Italy. He graduated high school from Naples, Italy in 1994 and attended New Mexico State University for photography and art history. A few years after graduating in 2000, he joined the Coast Guard and became a *Search and Rescue Pilot* in Miami, FL before becoming an *Instructor Pilot for Naval Flight School*.

He has continually pursued his love of art and film while in the Coast Guard and briefly attended the University of Miami for Film Studies before enrolling in the University of Florida's Art Education program. His Master's research has synthesized his love of art and teaching with flying. After this program, he plans to continue his education as an art educator and eventually found his own art school.