

Dan Reeve: Hi. Welcome to another Applied Learning podcast. I'm your host, Dan Reeve. This time I sit down with Nancy Yakimoski to talk about how she uses Applied Learning in her Arts courses. It's a great conversation. I hope you'll enjoy.

Nancy Yakimoski: My name is Nancy Yakimoski. I teach in the Visual Arts department. I've been there for 20 years, happily been there for 20 years. And I teach Art History, Visual Culture, Creative Photography, and a lens-based class, which is digital photography and video, and yeah. I don't know what else about me.

Dan Reeve: No. That's a great start.

Nancy Yakimoski: [crosstalk 00:00:43]

Dan Reeve: Okay, what are your values of teaching and learning that inspire you to start integrating ideas that are around applied learning?

Nancy Yakimoski: Well in the Visual Arts program, it is already an applied learning program. So, students are basically ... When we're teaching such a lens-based class or a creative photography class for example, I introduce the conceptual part of it, but there's also the technical part. How do we actually load film into a film camera? How do we process the film? Our department has always been about hands-on learning, right? It's been ... And that's the way I kind of came up through my own education as an art historian, as well as an artist in a few different mediums. This is the way I sort of learned, and I can't imagine somebody learning, like reading a book and then assuming they've got the knowledge to go out there and do it. I've always been in this sort of hands-on learning.

Dan Reeve: Okay, can you briefly describe or explain just an applied learning class or course that you want to talk about today?

Nancy Yakimoski: Sure. One thing that I helped spearhead was an event, we called it the Art-Poem-Art Experiment. And it came about ... The initial idea came out in about... in the fall of 2015 when one of my students and I, her name is Aileen Penner, went to an event at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. And at this event, Yvonne Blomer, who is Victoria's poet laureate, had this event where she invited poets to respond to works of art in a particular exhibition.

And, so we went to this gala and it was basically the artists reading a poem and us looking at the art piece. And Aileen and I looked at each other, it's like: "We should do this at Camosun because we've got this amazing Camosun art collection that nobody really knows about, and this is what we should do" And so we batted around the idea in the fall, and then it sort of grew from there and we brought in other people.

Do you want me to go into lots of detail about it?

Dan Reeve: We'll get it ... We'll unpack it as we go, but that gives us-

Nancy Yakimoski: The context.

Dan Reeve: That sort of general starting point.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay. We're going to now delve into the eight ideas or principles of applied learning, and we'll sort of try to talk about that in light of the project. But just in general too, in terms of how it connects to you as an instructor and a teacher. Well, the first one is the idea of intention. How do you decide that an experience or an application is the best way to learn a particular concept? Because you mentioned you start with a concept theory or idea. How do you connect that theory? What's your goal or your idea, your intention when come and you start?

Nancy Yakimoski: Well, the idea behind the Art-Poem-Art Experiment was to involve students in a variety of ways. And with the art world, it's great if you have a BFA, if you come up with your master, your MFA. But really when you get out there... it like... they ask you like: "What kind of experience do you have?" And I know ... I went to school with amazing artists, but they focus on their art practice without actually getting out and figuring out how to do an exhibition, or how to be a committee member, or participate in the art community. They kind of had this insular practice, and it was to their detriment. They didn't get contracts, they didn't get ... They didn't actually get a job afterwards. And in my own sort of art practice, and my sort of coming up in my career, that was really important. And I realized that that gives students the advantage.

Anytime for... like the visual arts students in this case, it was okay. "We're going to have this event and we want people to help us install the work. Who wants that kind of experience?" And we asked people: "Who wants that experience? And this is stuff for your art CV, right?" And then ... That was ... That's kind of the intention behind that... is giving students this real world experience that they could put on the resume. And that they could, if they've helped install art shows, they can go in and say, "Oh, I can volunteer, I can help." Or they can be hired by a gallery to install. And that's kind of the end goal for much of what the Art-Poem-Art Experiment was about.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Awesome. When you're planning an activity like this, what do you ... What is the long-term ... Are you trying to build a portfolio of skills? What is your long-term goal in terms of your intention ... In your intention again? In terms of the ... Because this is one project amongst many, like you have a vision for the kind of skills, the real world skills they're going to build.

Nancy Yakimoski: Well, because this project was a one-off project that Jay and I did off the side of our desk, it did give our students hands-on experience that they could take

forward. Within the program, we do have a course that is like the professional practices course. Where this is where students learn all the nuts and bolts about being an artist outside of their art practice, like how to promote themselves, how to put together a portfolio, building a website, how do you put together a package to submit to a curator? This is sort of the long-term plans that we sort of work towards. Our program is about giving students the hands-on skills that they need to ... Well, they basically explore a variety of practice mediums, and then we give them these extra skills that puts them on the path for a professional career.

Dan Reeve: Okay. To do that, and we can talk in terms of the program and also in terms of the project, the Art-Poem-Art, there's a lot of preparation for you to set this up. I guess the first question is sort of, how do you know when you're ready to sort of make it fly?

Nancy Yakimoski: You never know when you're ready to make it fly. I think the best thing you can do is trust that your project is going to be successful. I think you just have to believe that it's going to be successful on some level. And that there's going to be hiccups, there's going to be detours, there's going to be like, "Oh my God, we should have thought of that. How come we didn't think of that?" I think the best thing you do is just, you have a great idea, you know it's going to benefit students in some way and even the mistakes or the hiccups are a learning moment, right? You never know when you're ready, but you jump in and you build a team, people that you trust, people that have experience that you need, and you work through it as a team.

If you're thinking about doing a lone wolf thing, I think that's where you run into trouble because you can't be an expert in everything. And I think when the idea of, and it's also my philosophy... it's like, learning is not this monastic activity, right? We learn together, we collaborate, you know your strengths and my strengths, or we help each other out. You just kind of jump in and you ask for help when you need it and you probably ... And don't be afraid to ask for help. Yeah. So-

Dan Reeve: Okay.

Nancy Yakimoski: [inaudible 00:08:39] It's like fearless. You just have to be fearless and jump out of the nest.

Dan Reeve: Okay. And how ... Then now you've kind of talked on also a little bit how this, particularly the Art-Poem-Art project, began was you saw it, or a version of it, with one of your students at an art gallery downtown? And you're like, "Good idea."

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah, "We should do this."

Dan Reeve: There's a certain amount of, I want to say No-maj.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yes.

Dan Reeve: To the stuff you saw in the world that said, "Hey, let's try that here." When you plan out like... this activity, an applied learning activity, can you walk through the thought process when you consider equipment, logistics, learning material? You'll never think of everything, you've mentioned that, but what's your planning process as you start to think, you saw this thing, you think: "Hey, that's great. I think our students would love it and really benefit from it." What's your thought process in terms of logistics?

Nancy Yakimoski: With the Art-Poem-Art Experiment it was a huge project and three times the work that I thought it was going to be. Because I thought, "Oh, I've got ... I can totally do this." Basically this ... Aileen and I kind of sat down and it's like, "Let's do this." It's like... "Okay, how are we going to do this?" And so we brainstormed. So I think the first step is to brainstorm. It's like... "What do we want? How much effort is it going to take? How much money do we need? What's our timeline?" Sort of like a basic event planning, because it was basically this event. And then it's like... "Okay, so" ... One of the things that ... We needed money for it, because we had a publication, we needed money for the reception, we invited an artist and poet to give a workshop, but we didn't want to charge for the workshop.

First of all, we had to find the money. And then the idea with the money was that if this ... The money had to benefit students directly. Then it's like, "Oh, that's easy. We'll just get students involved" ... students that wanted to have experience curating an exhibition. There was a writing component, the poetry, so Jay had her students curate, like... vet the poems. What we did is we started out a basic timeline: "Where are we going to get the money? How are we going to get students involved? Who would be interested?" And just sort of broke it down according to a timeline. And we gave ourselves basically from the beginning of January, when we first put out the call for poets and artists, and then our final gala poetry reading and art show was on March 31st.

We had ... I mean, it's a very short timeline, but we did find money to hire students to do the work. And if we couldn't, we hired ... Aileen was a student at the time, so we hired her to do all of the details and build the website. And then we gave out honorariums to students that helped, because we couldn't pay them directly.

Dan Reeve: Right. Okay. Now, one of the other principals from preparation and planning is now authenticity, and you've already used it and I've heard others too say that real world activity. What is it about your student activity that ties it to some current and foundational elements or practices in your profession? And that seems pretty obvious in this case.

Nancy Yakimoski: Well, I mean, part of being an artist is to actually make the artwork and I mean, that's kind of on your own. But in order to get your work out there, you either

need to hire somebody to represent you, like a gallery, and then they usually take 60% of whatever they make. And I have not heard one artist that say, "Wow, I have a really great representation and I haven't been swindled or ..." Part of it is we have ... I think we're obligated to teach our program, like at the visual art students, about the real world out there. Once you leave the program, and you're an artist, and this is what you want to do in some way shape or form, these are the ways that you ... These are the ways to apply for a grant. These are the questions to ask people.

Nancy Yakimoski: This is ... When you have an art show, there are art fees to be paid to you and you need to make sure that they're being paid according to CARFAC rates. I mean, we are basically telling them ... Like giving them the inside scoop, which is just as important as learning the skills to make their artwork. It's like how to function as an artist out there or the next [crosstalk 00:13:39]-

Dan Reeve: So this is trade craft?

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah. I mean, and sometimes our students go on to be art therapists, teachers, I mean, it's a whole gamut. But the idea that there are things that they need to be aware of besides learning how to make art.

Dan Reeve: Right. Okay. A reflection is usually a key part in any process, whether it's student reflection or your own reflection, and we're going to ask a number of questions now about your process of reflection both for yourself and for your students. And we may hit on these things a little later on as well. What reflective questions or practices do you have students consider once they've completed part or the whole of a particular applied learning process?

Nancy Yakimoski: Well, within our program we meet with our students at midterm as well as at the end of the semester. And they also come out to talk about their progress or about their experience within that particular course. We also have an interview that the first-years do at the end of their second semester, before they go into second year. And we also have an exit survey that our graduating students have. We're always sort of getting them to reflect on the courses, the deliverables, the facilities... And we have that sort of built in as part of our program. There is that reflection on what they're learning and how they're learning. And our students are filled ... Because there's so much one on one with our students, if something is not working for them, they're in our office talking to us.

It's good because it's like there is a trust built in a program that is a really kind of a small one. Am I hitting that question correctly?

Dan Reeve: Sure.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah. I'm thinking what else? Within our program, there's already these systems built in. Within individual ... Like the courses that I teach, some of the assignments are... I get them to write artist statements about "Here's this

project” They have to research it, and they have to produce something. They get feedback on it, they get a chance to rework it before grading. And then oftentimes I will either ... I will get them to write an artist statement, which is just that's what you need to learn how to write. Or sort of if an artist statement isn't applicable, then I get them to do a reflection on it. Like what did you learn? What was ... What were the speed bumps? What were your eureka moments? And as a way to get them to think about just basic reflection. Because one of the things I think about being a student and our program... the students that take our program full time, they are here six, seven days a week.

Nancy Yakimoski: Like nine to five and come back at night. It is hard. It's an intense program and I think they don't have time for that reflection. So I try and build it in, it's like, "Okay. You've done this. What worked? What didn't work? What are you going to take forward?" As sort of putting it into practice.

Dan Reeve: How do you know, how do you pinpoint those times or breaks when students' reflection is really critical?

Nancy Yakimoski: When I see them getting tired actually. When I see that they are ... Usually by midterm, they're kind of... they've been going hard, and it's a way to kind of ease up on the workload, but also to make sure that they're also kind of staying in the flow. Because there's nothing worse than students that hit midterm and they kind of crash, and they are kind of scoop back up, and kind of come back to that level. I usually do those sorts of ... Because it's more ... It's not a research assignment, it's just like, "Huh." Like to sit down and kind of have a conversation with themselves. And sometimes I'll get them to have a conversation with their artwork. It's kind of you sit down and you ask your artwork questions or ... Yeah. It's just kind of a ... It's a way to ease up on the research element of the hands-on, and to get them to think critically in a different way, but also in a creative way.

Dan Reeve: Right. What about you, when and how do you reflect on applied learning activity?

Nancy Yakimoski: Oh, God. I ... After every class. After every ... Because I'm always trying something new. And I think that's what ... When you teach for a while, you become confident in your skills, right? And you can be more risky. You can kind of throw a cushion to the wind and just like, "I don't know if this is going to work." And you try it and it flies, or it flies but it kind of falters. And so it's like, "Okay. So next year ..." And always have in my notes, like, "Next year, one hour on this, take this out, try this approach." And so I'm always reflecting. But then the next crop of students comes and you try it, and it fails because they are not interested in talking or they're not ... It's always ... It's a hit and miss thing, and I think that's kind of the joy of teaching, is that you're never standing on solid ground.

Nancy Yakimoski: It's kind of shifting sand and you just do your best, and you try and read the students and ... And I mean the teaching also has to be engaging for the instructor, and what excites me, I think it's cool when I see students sitting in front of their artwork for half an hour asking their questions. And they're thinking: "This is like ... This is crap, what am I doing? This is stupid." And then, I don't know, I kind of like watching them struggle. I do. Because I think that's where you learn. It's like: "Okay, where is your place in this and how are you going to make it work? Here's the problem, what's your solution?"

Dan Reeve: Okay. How does students' reflection impact an applied learning project? I assume you're getting feedback from, like the Art-Poem-Art. If you were to do it again or how would students' reflection on it impact how you did it another time?

Nancy Yakimoski: Well, the students that ... Because we went like... the people we had... like Jay was responsible for the poetry, Rick was responsible for ... And two of our students, Rick was teaching in our department at that time. He was responsible for curating. I was responsible ... I think I ... What was I doing? I think I was...I was doing the publication. And so I asked ... It was like... I asked the students we worked with: "What was good about it?" And then I also asked Jay and Aileen and Rick, and we had Mike. Mike is the technician in our department and so he worked with a student to install the art show...It's like... "What was good? What wasn't good?" And so everybody gave feedback. The students, the people that were responsible for kind of mentoring and guiding them.

And we kind of took that all in. But nobody said: "Oh, it was terrible." It was basically... we asked students who were interested. It wasn't like: "Okay, you have to do this." It's like: "Who wants this experience?" And the people that stepped up were ... They stepped up and they were excited about it. Yeah. But I mean there was ... Yeah. But it was like: "Oh, maybe we could have used like two days to install the art show instead of one day." Or ... Right like it's just those kinds of logistics.

Dan Reeve: Right. Okay. We're going to move on now and we're going to talk a little bit about orientation, and training, and engagement. How do you ... And you kind of touched on this a little bit. You've talked about being an experienced instructor and sort of having the confidence to try things, and recognizing some things work great with one class but maybe not so well with another, or the magic, the alchemy of a greatest thing happens sort of and you let it run. How do you prepare yourself to guide an experiential learning activity? What about you when you're coming in to that?

Nancy Yakimoski: Oh, I think about... I start backwards. It's like: "Okay, what's the end goal?" Right? We've got the learning outcomes for a particular course, and I'll talk about ... Yeah. The course is probably a good place to start. For example, right now I am teaching lens class, which is an art one six one. And we're at a point now where students are going to be learning how to use the DSLR camera in

video mode. They're going to have to do something called a durational photograph, which is basically a long exposure photograph that when you look at it, it looks like a photograph, but then something happens... 13 seconds out of the 20 where like a blade of grass blows in the wind, and it's like, "Oh!" And suddenly you have to rethink, it's not a photograph, it's a video. And what's my position as a spectator?"

Nancy Yakimoski: In that kind of ... Because this is ... Probably in five years the durational photograph will not be a thing anymore because it's where technology is, which is kind of exciting that we can use the same camera to take stills and as well as video. Because once upon a time you would have a camera for this one camera for that. When I'm thinking about like the durational photograph component, I'm thinking about: "Okay, in the end they have to produce one durational photograph. Okay. What does that mean?" Because nobody knows what it means. Then it's like: "Okay, what do they need? Will they need to research it? Okay. What kind of questions do I need to formulate, and links, and artists? Do I need to supply them with an assignment to help them understand that?"

And then it's like "okay" And then the technical stuff, "When do I introduce that?" And then it's sort of like... I just kind of work backwards. And then ... And I get students ... I do a flipped classroom approach because I think that is kind of the only way to teach. I think that's just the best way to teach the courses I teach.

Dan Reeve: And maybe you can just quickly-

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Just what do you mean by flipped classroom?

Nancy Yakimoski: With my version of a flipped classroom is that, I divide ... In the visual arts program we have students... they have five classes a week in the full-time program, but each class is four hours. We have a chunk of time, it's not divided up into two 80-minute classes. And we've got a chunk of time once a week. What I do with the flipped classroom approach is, they encounter the information before they get to the classroom, and then that four hours is divided into hands-on demos. That's when we teach them how to use the camera, they experiment with it so that they are ready to do the assignment, I make sure that they understand the assignment, I'll go over it, I'll ask them questions in the classroom time.

And also that's the time I meet with them and give one on one critique, so we do small group discussions, and then they have homework. That's when they go and shoot their assignments or they research it. So, the flipped classroom... I have it in just basically three components. It's the pre-class stuff, this is the stuff they have to read, or watch, or think about, or answer, and they sort of... they come prepared. And then the class is the time when I go over and make sure



there's no questions, they understand the assignment, they do the hands-on, and then they have the homework. Where they have to go out and apply it. They have to go shoot their durational photograph, they have to edit it, they have to do all of that.

Nancy Yakimoski: And within that... it's like, okay, well then with the flipped classroom they'd have to do the research. It's like... I structure it so that it's an efficient use of their time. It's not go research durational photographs, because it's also kind of called time images, or time photography. What I do is I give them very detailed information sheets, probably more detail than they ... I think because I know one of the things that I have to reflect on and figure out is, I give lots of information, and I try to do it on the least amount of paper, but I think the design of lots of information is important. Because they see three or four pages of information and they're overwhelmed, right?

And especially I've got a student ... I'm teaching a student with autism and they're just right... he's like... "Aah." And deadlines. I've got students that have these different needs, so I have to figure out a way to actually take that same information and break it down into chunks, which may be a workbook, I'm not sure. That's kind of one of the things I have to reflect on. I just I chunk it up in terms of what's the end goal, and then have really detailed assignments that help them with their research. And then ask them those questions, reflect on it, and answer those questions in the class. It takes ... It's a hell of amount of work, it's so much work. I'd probably have worked this hard since I first started teaching here. When you're just getting all your stuff together. But by making the students responsible for that, I'm finding that at least this crop of students, they are very much engaged. That they come in knowing and it's not like they're blowing off the readings because they're not going to know what's happening.

Dan Reeve: Right. How do you explain, the AL process to the students which is sometimes called meta-teaching or sort of... How do you explain the 'why we're doing this' and how it connects to the 'how we're doing this'.

Nancy Yakimoski: Right.

Dan Reeve: Why are you doing a long-duration film?

Nancy Yakimoski: Right. Exactly. What I do is ... This is where I sort of like do the lecture part because students are very different now than they were like 10 years ago. Where they would come up ... They would show up and they were just like, "Whatever you teach me is fine because you're the authority." But now students are like, "Well, I don't ..." Like they're questioning things, right? We're not this all-knowing being that they kind of ... I felt revered when I first started teaching 20 years ago. Like I was this expert, right? And it's like I know some stuff. But now students are much more ... They're engaged in a way ... They're engaged in their learning in a different way where, they want the most bang for their buck now.

Nancy Yakimoski: And it's like, and they ask those questions like: "Why are we learning this?" And I like that because it's like, "Okay, perfect." I've had to basically justify ... Learn how to justify what I'm doing. And I usually do that by just putting into context. Like with this durational photography, that's when I talk to them in class because I like ... I don't know, it's like that one on one because I love that. It's like: "well here's the whole course, we're talking about still photography and the decisive moment, we did an assignment on the constructed image, now we're doing something on durational, and then we're going to be doing video"

This is kind of the trajectory of the course and then this fits into ... This is how it fits into the course, but this is also how it fits into art practices. When you make a durational photograph, are you doing something same as Scott McFarland or Owen [Kid 00:29:21] or what's your purpose? It's about contextualizing it. And I think as soon as students realize that it's not this thing that they have to do for marks, and has no connection, they're in, right? I think that's the buy-in where they see it, in terms of the trajectory of the course as well as in the art world.

Dan Reeve: Okay. If you work with a community partner, does your preparation differ?...Like an art gallery-

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Or someone else?

Nancy Yakimoski: If I bring in ... If I get my art history students or visual culture students to go to an art gallery, it's usually emails like, "We're coming down." I don't have a lot of experience with working with outside partners. Yeah. Usually it's just kind of within the college. Yeah. And I mean, with... working within the college has its own set of, I won't say "challenges" but I mean it's like... how do you book a room? Who do you talk to if you want money? Right. Yeah, so different. So no to the community partners [crosstalk 00:30:37]-

Dan Reeve: Okay. And then that's ... Every instructor does different things. You can't do all things. Let's ... We're going to talk a little bit about monitoring now and there's a reflective piece to this. We recognize that sometimes an activity doesn't go as planned, sometimes that's for better and sometimes that's for worse. How do you assess your students' experience in light of... you've talked about learning outcomes, like you reverse engineer. So something doesn't go the way you'd hoped, you'd set up these learning outcomes. How do you ... What's your process on recognizing that and then assessing it?

Nancy Yakimoski: Right. Within my courses it is like... "Did the majority get it?" Because I mean, the first thing I always think of like... "Okay. What did I do wrong?" Right. Because I would like, "Oh, well if they're not learning or if it went sideways, there must be something that I did." Then it's like... "Okay, well did they have enough ..." Then I sort of go through my system. "Okay. Did they have enough time to prepare? Were the questions readable, where they ..." And I'll ask them,

it's just like so ... And they're like... "Well I didn't understand the question and it's like... people were like guiding me." And it's like, "Okay, well, this is what I wanted, so how would I better word that?" Because sometimes I'm using language that maybe it's too academic, or it assumed knowledge that maybe I introduced in September, but they didn't remember in November.

Nancy Yakimoski: I go through my stuff and I ask the students, it's like, "Okay, so who didn't get this and why?" And I mean that's always a courageous step too because as soon as you ... Because it is kind of showing students your jugular, right? It's like, "Okay, well this went wrong, some of you got it, some of you didn't, so what happened, because I want to do this better." I usually ... And then I revamp. I haven't had something fall so terribly on its face that it was unsalvageable.

But I think if you're just sort of honest with students say like, "You know what this is what I thought and it didn't work. Let's redo the assignment or I'll grade it again, or ..." That's what I would do if something really went sideways but ... Yeah. No, I haven't had any yeah. So-

Dan Reeve: No. And sometimes when things go sideways, like you're doing a project and ... But that sideways shows that real world experience. Just like in the classroom... can represent the real world but things go sideways, that is the nature of things. In the real world a project ... You don't see it if you're walking into an art gala and you just assume, oh, the show opened at seven and everything was beautiful. What you didn't see is how chaotic everything was at 5:30.

Nancy Yakimoski: Exactly. Yeah. And I think ... Because I remember telling one of my colleagues at the college here it's like I just ... We're talking about what happens when things go sideways. And I said, "You know what now, I just own it because it's like, what else have you got?" Because you're going to stand there and go like, "I'm the authority." And everybody is like, "Well that was like ..." Really, that's ... There's nothing worse than sitting on a committee with somebody who always thinks that they're right and they can't own up a mistake, right? That they're covering up because their ego is at stake or ... It's just like, you know when it goes sideways, own it, how are you going to make it better? Because ultimately that's what ... You know I want people to walk away with it's like: "Okay, well that fell on its face, but she gave us another chance, and we re-worked it and ..." Right. And that's ... I think that's the way to do it.

Dan Reeve: Right. And that takes a certain kind of trust with your students, and a certain kind of courage internally to be like: "I thought that was pretty great. I worked really hard and then it floundered. But it may not have flopped."

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: But it-

Nancy Yakimoski: I thought it would go this way and it kind of went this way and ... I mean sometimes it goes this way and so it's like: "Oh that's an interesting ... That's interesting. So why did you guys go that way? Because I thought there were ..." And it's like-

Dan Reeve: 90 degrees askew from where you thought it would go.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah. Right. And I mean, I'm their parents' generation, so we're thinking way different. So...

Dan Reeve: Yes.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: What reset tools do you have if things are starting to go askew in a way that you don't like?

Nancy Yakimoski: Actually ... Research tools?

Dan Reeve: Reset.

Nancy Yakimoski: Reset.

Dan Reeve: Yeah. Just the idea like... you're in a class experience in applied learning and you're like: "Oh." Something's come up and you're like either ... For example, things aren't engaging, you thought this would be fire and people would love it and there's kind of a murmur of...

Nancy Yakimoski: Like discontent [crosstalk 00:35:13]-

Dan Reeve: Or just not engaged in the way. How do you reset that?

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah. Well usually the things that don't go as planned, and... typically are like discussion-based things, right? Because either students are exhausted, or they didn't do the reading, or they don't want to open their mouths or ... Right? I mean you can't make people talk. What I'll do is I'll ... Like with a discussion-based aspect, I'll ask a question, you'll get the murmur, I'll make a joke about "is there a pause out there?" And then I'll ask the question again, and if nothing happens, then what I'll do is I will ask a ridiculous question. I will ask something that is really just out there, but the idea with whatever I ask will bring us back to whatever I'm trying to discuss.

If I'm talking about ... Like in the art history, in my cultural uses of photography, I remember with the first early lectures when you try to get students to engage, so we talk about, they represent how middle class British ... The British middle class represented themselves in these little photographs called [inaudible 00:36:29]. And I'll be talking about it and they're like, half of them won't have

done the reading, some of them don't want to talk about. What I did like last semester was, I just asked a question about Facebook because ultimately it's about self-representation. What's something that they know that they could talk about that isn't really connected to what I'm talking about, but is? It's more like a contemporary equivalent. And then I'll kind of bring it back to, "Well, this is what's happening in 19th century, it's not so different from what we're doing today with just how we represent it." But I usually ask that kind of that odd ball question because it kind of brings them back, and it redirects them, because sometimes ... Yeah, it's just it's the way things are posed.

Nancy Yakimoski: That's kind of the reset. Or if an assignment isn't going ... Because usually I try new assignments every semester, which is a lot of work and I don't know why I do that but ... And if it's ... It's like: "Okay. I thought this would take a week and it's obvious it's going to take two weeks." Now it's like: "Okay, so you guys ..." I'll just say: "You know, I thought this was going to take a week, it's going to take two weeks, so let's break it down and instead of this being due today, this will be due at the end." And then break it up. So...

Dan Reeve: Okay. That actually brings us nicely into assessment and evaluation. How do you structure your formative and summative assessments for the students?

Nancy Yakimoski: I give the ... Because most of them kind of listen and they don't listen, I usually have lots of things written down. I have on their assignment sheets it's like... "Here's the learning objectives" and it's basically tied to the learning outcomes, "Here's a general way I'm going to be assessing it" And then I see the rubric on D2 for more. I have ... I usually give them all that information in many different ways. And then I talk about it in class, I have examples. It's like... "This is a great example of a photograph; this isn't." Because I have lots of different learners. Let me think what else.

Yeah. And I have them critique their each other's work. I come in and look at it, we give them feedback so they can improve it. There's lots of different ways that they know what the assignment is, how it's going to be evaluated. Troubleshooting with your photograph, it shouldn't have a yellow cast and if it does, here's that ... It's obvious: "do this, reshoot" or "here's how you do it in Photoshop" There's lots of sort of in points and exit points about their work.

Dan Reeve: Right.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's take a step back now, we're looking overall and sort of like a wired lens on assessment evaluation. What evidence have you seen that applied learning activities deepen student understanding of a concept, theory, idea, or a field?

Nancy Yakimoski:

I think... because there's so many different kinds of learners and maybe, and in one single of the visual arts department or students that come through our program. But I mean, some of these kids were in art because they couldn't get math or ... And I think that was an easy way. It's like, "Oh, you're not good in the sciences, and you seem to be drawing and you are interested in art, so we'll just shoot you over there." We've got students that come with a wide variety of different skill sets, and sort of learning approaches. And so in terms of how the more hands-on and the more different ways that they have to engage with something, that one of those ways is going to sort of take. And each assignment ... The students are different, every class they come in.

They're on their game, they're not on their game, they've done the assignment, they've kind of done like... So, you have to sort of be kind of prepared for everything. But I think when you offer or you structure your courses in a way that they have to be responsible for it, they don't kind of sit there and take it in ... And it's funny how many students register for my courses, and then they learn that it's a flipped classroom approach, and that they basically have homework to do before they come to class, they're out, right? And right away you get those people that they can't deal with that. But if they have to read, and think, and answer questions, and tie it to their own art practice, and they get hands-on things, they walk away knowing. Because I mean it would be easy for them just to... Ultimately we could just record all our demos. Like here is how to use the DSLR camera, and have a YouTube clip and they sit there and they watch it for an hour.

But they can't stop and ask a question or they can't come up and say, like "look through the lens" And the way that we ... Like in my lens class right now, when Mike is showing them how to use a DSLR camera, he's got everything monitor. So he's actually ... And it's live feed, right? It's like, "Okay, if I switch this here, you can see it's a yellow cast because now this and this." It's on the spot learning and showing the 'whys' and the 'how comes' instead of just like, "Do it this way." And as soon as they understand, "Oh, I didn't... It's a tungsten light and I've got it set on daylight, no wonder it's like this weird cast." The more ways you can come at teaching besides book learning, and research that gives them a ... It's a more holistic way to teach.

And at least ... I mean, that's the way I learned, right? It's like I need to see it, I need to write it, I need to think about it, I need to apply it. And so when it comes inside that package of learning, where they're engaged and they have to be engaged, and then they have to apply it. And they know they have to apply so they better listen in the demo, then they walk away, I think, richer students. And I know when we talk to ...

When our students go on and do a BFA in those other institutions, we always get told by other instructors, it's like, "We love your students because they're problem solvers, they're creative thinkers, if they don't have a tripod, they'll

build one out of three sticks and a rock." Like that's the kind of thinking that we encourage.

Dan Reeve: Right. Let's talk about that final transformation a little bit. One of... the last element of applied learning principles is acknowledgement. How do you celebrate the student transformation?

Nancy Yakimoski: Oh, wow. Like, individually or as a group? Anyway? I have to remember that. Because we teach so many students, I want them to get through it. I'm always in the critical mode. It's like, "Okay, well this has a cast and you should do this and this." But I always have to pull back and it's like: "You know what...? What did they do right?" Right? Because it's always ... And sometimes it's really easy to do because a student will have struggled and struggled and then they produce something that's outstanding. And it could be outstanding, it may be a B+ and not an A+. But it's outstanding because they started out at like a C, right. And I just... I get them to look at it and tell them like: "I hope you're proud because you did this, this, and this, and this."

And because I work with them one on one, and I see their projects through all stages, I know their struggles because I ask them. I was like, "Okay, what were your successes and what were the potholes?" Right. And it's not like they just show me a final product. Individually, it's like: "You did awesome." Like, "That was a really hard concept and you nailed it." Right? And as a group, I mean we also get students to show their work. We've got some spaces on campus that we've kind of negotiated. And it's ... And the students have to show their work, and I think that's where they get a real big sense of accomplishment. It's not like something I did in class and then three people saw it and my teacher.

It's like now it's up in the library and students are walking by and seeing it, and there is your name and ... I just... going to celebrate it one on one. And because we do midterm interviews and final interviews, I've got that one on one time with them for sure if I don't see them in class. Yeah. That's how I kind of do it.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Have you ... As we've gone through this conversation, is there anything else you want to add or any ideas that have kind of percolated? Did you ... Any suggestions you have for people who are interested in applied learning or just anything that's kind of in front in mind?

Nancy Yakimoski: I just ... I think it's an exciting way to teach, and I think it's an exciting way to learn. And for my ... I structure things the way that I would like to be taught, which is lots of information, lots of different ways of coming at it. And most of the times it will be fine, like there is ... Like how could it not be fine. It's a win-win. If it's successful... "yay, yay, yay for you, you did it" Students got something out of it. And if something goes sideways or not as planned, that's a learning opportunity too.

Nancy Yakimoski: Yeah. Just you have to be kind of fearless. Which is easy to say after you've been teaching for a long time, but I wouldn't have been fearless in the first five years teaching here. Because it's like, "Well, what will the dean say?" But we've also had deans... so it's like, "Go for it. Like try what's the worst that can happen?" The culture at the college is such, within arts and science at least, it's like, "Try it."

Dan Reeve: Okay. Great. Well thank you very much for your ideas and thoughts, and we'll end it there.

Nancy Yakimoski: Great.