

BASIC TRAINING: INSPIRING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
THE FINE AND PROFESSIONAL ARTS THROUGH WHOLISTIC PRACTICE  
AND SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2003

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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## ABSTRACT

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May 2003

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This paper documents the process by which I developed “Basic Training”, a wholistic program for the education of artists, and came to see this program as a model for sustainability education more generally.

I am an artist who, shortly before joining the Critical and Creative Thinking Program (CCT) at the University of Massachusetts/Boston (UMass), left my full-time job so I could have more time for painting. I have done this – establishing a studio, a practice, and networking – culminating in both solo and group exhibits of my small and large paintings and works on paper. To make ends meet, I took on a half-time position as a painting studio manager at Massachusetts College of Art (MassArt). Finding that I was the first person in this position, I put into place studio guidelines and organization to ensure a personally healthy and environmentally responsible workspace. This led me to develop a three-part plan, “Basic Training” for artists, making use of the tools for personal and organizational change I was learning through my course work in CCT – strategic planning, evaluation, problem-based learning, dialogue, teamwork, and reflective practice.

“Basic Training” not only includes health and environmental concerns, but also an artist’s responsibility to engage with the communities that artists rely on to experience and support our artwork. In this spirit, I took up an offer of use of a storefront in Jamaica Plain, and initiated the Efka Project. As Efka Project’s director and coordinator I coach emerging artists to prepare, publicize, curate, and staff their first exhibits. In turn, Efka Project provides an opportunity for the public to gain exposure to, and education about artists in their community who are about to embark on their careers. I went on to develop a curriculum for MassArt and explore the institutional challenges of getting this implemented. I was also drawn into education for sustainability efforts at UMass/Boston and have translated my MassArt course into a possible UMass course for a more general group of students – not only artists. In the process described in this I have experimented and taken risks in applying what I was learning in CCT, reflecting on the outcomes, and building up a set of tools, practices, and perspectives that work in my specific professional and personal endeavors.

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## CHAPTER 1

### SETTING THE SCENE

As an artist and educator I wish and need to grow, and have found that I do so most positively when I am satisfied in my studio work and intellectual pursuits. In my fine artist role I am influenced and inspired by artists as guides, mentors, and colleagues. As an educator, I am afforded the opportunity to share my experience and knowledge while learning from those I interact with, students, faculty, and visiting artists. There is nothing that compares to one on one, artist to artist example, experiential tutoring and guidance.

I began making art at a young age. I remember some of my earliest experiences – with my mom, friends, teachers, mentors – and successful productions led to enhanced self-esteem and a desire to share what I had learned. Out in the real world, after earning a BFA, I entered the arenas of museum, gallery, art administration, non-profit institutions, design, commercial and eventually management areas – it seemed so “practical”. It struck me one day that I had not ended up in the life I had always pictured myself in – I wasn’t a painter, printmaker, or artist of any kind. I had been doing a little painting, but I wasn’t committed to my studio work in a full and satisfying way.

I’d been raised and taught to politely and grammatically put myself second, and may have mis-interpreted the lesson. Without touching on the perhaps co-dependent implications here, let me just state that all my life I have risen to the occasion of taking care of everyone and everything around me – accepting the responsibility. Through soul-searching, career searching, and listening I became acutely aware of the ramifications of self-neglect.

The leap was inevitable– I had to jump! With an open heart I prayed for the safety net to

appear and walked away from my “day job” to free the artist within me. I found a job working part-time as a studio manager in an art college, which afforded me the time to pull together a studio space of my own, and design a lifestyle and habits I could be creatively and artistically productive in.

### Practice

I began my journey with myself. I started with the physical – a gentle, but committed program of physical improvement through diet, exercise and personal care. I joined a gym, for the first time in my life, and a spiritually based self-improvement group. I exercised, and worked out daily, attended regular meetings. It became easier over time and with perseverance to show-up and feel good about taking care of myself – becoming healthier. This led to a stronger and fresher mental outlook and capacity. I embarked on the program Julia Cameron offers in The Artist’s Way (1992). This led me to a daily practice of writing and drawing – getting back into the habit of “practicing”. The tools of *freewriting* were employed through Morning Pages and Daily Hour (sketching) – it didn’t matter what came out onto the page, it just mattered that I showed up at the page, and was doing it. As I began to explore new ideas in a fresh approach I had a spiritual awakening that led me from my “care-taking” (of everyone else) role to new insights regarding “care-taking” on a personal level that when modeled translates to “care-taking” on a broader level that centers more on responsibility, not co-dependency.

## Studio Management and A New Way of Seeing

I became a studio manager for painters for purely selfish reasons – to be around other painters and become a better painter by learning everything about a medium I was not formally trained in, but working in. In this role I have discovered a lot about environments inside and outside of the studio, and have improved and developed my personal and studio habits through applying a foundation of “basics” to relieve me and free my creativity.

I realized, being the first painting studio manager ever employed by my institution, that there was no studio management going on, or being taught there. I began developing a basic studio management program for the artists I work with – students, professionals, and art educators. The focus is on how to set-up a safe and environmentally responsible work space in order to develop habits that would become almost automatic and free the artist to “think” only about the work – creating. I have found that disorganization and ignorance of materials had interfered with my caliber of work and time usage. In developing this program, through my own experience and incorporating it in my space and life, I began teaching by example.

I was learning so much about myself. I was learning so much about the world I was re-entering. It began to take on an even newer shape as I found myself being absorbed by not only personal development and art making, but also academia. I needed more tools to satisfy my curiosity and help me to better develop my place in this place. An MFA program didn't seem to answer the questions I was asking... but the Critical and Creative Thinking Program (CCT) at the University of Massachusetts/Boston (UMass/Boston) grabbed my attention and intrigued me. So I applied, was accepted, and began. I looked forward with enthusiasm to partnership with people from other and different schools of thought and discipline. The tools were offered, and everything changed again.

I came to the CCT program with an agenda: I was going to rock the world of studio management, and the fine arts department I worked for, by finding a way/learning how to be the best damn studio manager with the best damn program... and with the added credential teach my program as a course. I was determined, and registered for classes within the prescribed/suggested order. I wasn't sure how all the requirements fit my needs. Why did I need to take Philosophy or Psychology? Seeing can become more than observation. Understanding can be more than just thinking – it can be new ways of thinking. These are the things I am interested in as a painter and educator. These are the concerns that influenced my work in the Critical and Creative Thinking Program, in my studio, and the studios I manage.

My work in the CCT program led me to look to other institutions, research, and studies concerning these issues and developing a program to propose using at my institution (and others?). I visited and spoke with people from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Maryland Institute of Art, the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the art department of UMass/Boston, and art and sustainability education people at Ball State University/Indiana. The area of studio management in higher education appears at this time to be relatively new and developing. The fine line between rules and allowing for creative expression can become extremely blurred. These new challenges to old, or traditional, techniques are complicated and delicate to navigate without meeting resistance and creating storms along the way.

As my two worlds – studio management and graduate work in CCT – began to intersect, other opportunities presented themselves and my experience broadened. I discovered that much of the “career” planning knowledge that artists must acquire for survival also needed to be passed along through mentoring and “hands-on” practice. The community element of the studio experience was as important as the personal and environmental. A component related to that

needed to be added to my program.

My goal remains to encourage creativity not interfere with it, and to apply it to the “whole culture” of our community. I’ve come to realize and believe – while acquiring new skills and outlooks – that these principles and processes, ideas and ideals, could be applied to a much wider and varied audience. In a time when sensitivity to sustainability is a hot topic in world affairs, and on campuses internationally, it seems logical to make a connection between artist survival (thrival) and sustainability for humanity’s continued endurance. This leads to my proposal of a campus-wide approach to wholistic sustainability education and a plan for implementing it. All members of the community will benefit when wholistic sustainability education is put into action.

The following chapters guide the reader through the process by which I discovered and defined my need to develop personally and artistically, as well as thoughtfully and more openly. In order to address my concerns and become equipped to develop what I call the Basic Training Program, a (w)holistic program for artists centering on the studio experience, I needed to explore my philosophy of practice, modeling, and mentoring. I needed to implement and evaluate methods and components, while broadening the scope of possibilities by working with others. I risked sharing my ideas as they developed, seeking the confidence of others, to gain consideration and support to make my case for wholistic sustainability education. At the end I reflect on the results and future prospects of the proposal.

## CHAPTER 2

### ARTIST TRAINING

Remembering stories I'd heard over the years about teachers and friends who had become ill (and other, even great artists, who had become physically compromised as a result of poor studio habits), and having built a studio in my home, I am concerned about the environmental conditions I create in art making for my household and myself. What about the impact on the environment at large? I cannot shake my fist at science and corporate pollution if I am polluting as well. What are the environmental responsibilities of artists? Environmentally many artists are not aware of or engaged in the effects our actions and materials place on the environment both structurally and chemically. This pertains to both environmental art and pollution. I think the responsibilities are the same, morally and ethically – as for all people. There is nothing sadder than seeing someone work diligently all their life to achieve a certain level of mastery in their craft and then be unable to continue due to sickness. It is the artist's responsibility to keep oneself and environment in as good a condition as possible – to not subject oneself or others by one's own irresponsibility to demise.

“For years, Merle Spandorfer, a printmaker, painter, and photographer, used oil-based techniques, chemicals like ammonium dichromate, and pigments with cadmium. Until she contracted breast cancer in the mid-1980s, she “had no idea” that her art materials fell under the category of suspected carcinogens. Today, Spandorfer, author of Making Art Safely (a book with information on alternative methods and materials for drawing, painting, printmaking, graphic design, and photography), uses only water-based solvents and works with vinyl gloves. “I’ve probably had more [professional] success since switching to all water-based systems,” she says in response to a query as to whether health concerns inevitably lead to artistic compromises. “My health is the most important thing,” she adds. Put simply, education saved Spandorfer’s life. “When I got breast cancer, I told myself that if I got well, I would make it my mission to educate myself and other artists as to what they were

using,” she says. “I don’t want to stop anyone from doing something they want to do but if I’ve learned anything, it’s that there are intelligent ways of working.” (Josephs, 1999)

## Studio Management

In his book What Painting Is, the painter-turned-art historian James Elkins communicates the experience of painting through the language of alchemy exploring what it is a painter really does in the studio – the smells, the mess, the struggle to control the uncontrollable. Like alchemists, artists try to find transformation through and in their medium and discipline. But what is the artist’s responsibility around the chosen medium?

Artists and scientists have written numerous manuals for use in studios as materials and safety references. Ralph Mayer’s The Artist’s Handbook, originally published in 1940 and revised several times has become a ‘bible’ for many practicing artists and art students. A serious reference to materials, materials handling, and how to produce work that will last through the centuries, its detailed index makes a wealth of information readily available – with charts and line drawings throughout. Mark David Gottsegen’s The Painter’s Handbook (1993) is more specifically oriented, presenting details on the vast array of materials available to the fine art painter. He devotes entire chapters to painting mediums -- composition, characteristics, and application methods along with recipes for making art materials, health and safety issues concerning the effects of paints, solvents, and varnishes, and new and unusual products on the market. Michael McCann presents the latest principles governing safety and labeling of products and new chemicals in his Artist Beware: The Hazards in Working With All Art and Craft Materials and the Precautions Every Artist and Photographer Should Take (2001). It clearly highlights the potential dangers for artists in such fields as: painting, photography, ceramics, sculpture, printmaking, woodworking, textiles, etc. It has an important section on health hazards

for children working with art materials. In The Artist's Complete Health and Safety Guide (2001), Monona Rossol thoroughly treats an important, often neglected topic – made necessary by new research that has changed safety information and threshold limit values for a number of chemicals used in art materials– covering hazards, art materials ingredients, compliance with health and safety laws, safe practices and protective equipment, and non-toxic products for children and those who are especially sensitive.

These books and others like them have answered questions regarding materials and their safety as well as the concerns within certain techniques and procedures. Still, there is nothing that compares to one on one, artist to artist example, experiential tutoring and guidance. It is important to recognize and embrace this responsibility to mentor and to allow oneself opportunities to gain more and newer information. Students are taught how to handle and apply the materials they use within their disciplines first and foremost to create their art. Many times the health and safety concerns connected with those materials are briefly discussed at their introduction, but then all focus centers on application. Attention to developing good habits – or practice – around the materials is often neglected leaving artists susceptible to harm by their own untrained hand. It is not enough to offer students books that will sit on shelves in their studios, or elsewhere (shudder) – people learn better and more through required reading, demonstration, and modeling of proper handling and maintenance on a regular basis.

### Sustainability Education

In a time when the whole planet is overtaxed by irresponsible handling of hazardous and other waste it is imperative that artists – we who create beauty from chaos- should be concerned

with our contributions to the larger picture. By starting in our basic environments – studio space – before we even consider our participation in the grander scheme of life, we can begin to understand survival in a more fundamental way, namely in terms of sustainability. This is the concept that, through critical and creative thinking, and reflective practice, we can transfer between those habits of mind and our studio habits to attain sustainability on all levels in our lives. We cannot make art while contributing to environmental destruction – and an unhealthy environment will make us sick. Ailing artists cannot make art.

“Schools have a long way to go; and artists go to doctors with problems and don’t think to tell them what they’re working with,” says Merle Spandorfer, “If people today get up and go jogging, then they have to think about the art materials they use as part of their lifestyle,” she says. “The artists of the past were disheveled and had paint all over them. The artists of the future have clean studios and wear gloves, if they’re educated.” (Josephs, 1999)

In the recent past a surge of interest has sprung up across campuses nationally and internationally in sustainability education. University leaders around the globe and across the country have joined together to promote the idea and implementation of campus “greening” through mutually agreed (signed) declarations and the creation of coalitions of faculty, students, staff, and administrators representing colleges and universities in concerted efforts toward those ends. Examples of those, i.e.: Talloires Declaration, The Halifax Declaration, ACU -- The Swansea Declaration, The Kyoto Declaration, CRE Copernicus Charter, Student Declaration for a Sustainable Future, Earth Summit Agreements are delivered by David Johnston, (President, McGill University) in his address to the Quinquennial Conference (1995) (Appendix 1).

Why include all this information in a paper about artist training and education? After attending a sustainability faculty workshop at UMass/Boston, and becoming acquainted with James (Jimmy) Eflin of Ball State University, I was offered the preceding information, plus

much more. Jimmy asked us: “If colleges and universities are leaders in the quest for knowledge, why can’t they be leaders on the path to a sustainable future?”

What has become clear is that “survival” training for artists is sustainability education on a more specific level. Yet the ideas I have about community and connectedness link them directly— it has become clear that the principles and processes, ideas and ideals, of sustainability education could easily be transferred and applied to an art curriculum.

“The concept of sustainability was introduced in the early 1980s by Lester Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute, who defined a sustainable society as one that is able to satisfy its needs without diminishing the chances of future generations.” (Brown, 1981)

Some definitions of sustainability, as offered during the Eflin presentation are:

- “Meeting the twin needs of protecting the environment and alleviating poverty”  
– *Friends of the Earth*
- “Treating the earth as if we meant to stay”  
– *Sir Crispin Tickell*
- “Turn resources into junk no faster than nature can turn junk back into resources”  
– *Steve Goldfinger*
- Capability + to Sustain or Endure
- The “triple-bottom line”: People, Planet, Profit
- The “Three Es”: Ecology, Economics, Social Equity
- “Sustainability” implies that the critical activities of a higher education institution are (at a minimum) ecologically sound, socially just and economically viable, and that they will continue to be so for future generations.  
– *University Leaders for a Sustainable Future*

When asked “how long will sustainability take?” William McDonough remarked: “Forever. That’s the point.”

The infusion of sustainability into art training and the other required courses artists take would go beyond and further enhance the wholistic nature of the Basic Training Program and further diffuse the pixelated learning experience between art and academic requirements in degree programs. Science and art are both about seeking truth, yet the connection escapes if the opportunity for knowledge transfer is not presented and accessible.

“ A widely accepted conceptual model presents sustainability as a quest toward three interrelated objectives: 1) environmental integrity; 2) economic vitality; and 3) social equity. We believe people should be encouraged to begin thinking about sustainability from any of these three perspectives. We should engage people “where they are at” and incorporate the thinking of many viewpoints as we “move toward the center” of the sustainability triangle. “ (Gerber, et. al., 2002)

## Career Planning

Artists must also consider personal sustainability – which includes making a living. Most colleges and universities offer career placement and advice through an office dedicated to placing students in ‘jobs’ when they graduate. Professional Artists and Designers find these services helpful, when they’re available, if the career placement personnel stay current within those disciplines and outreach. Because of the unusual opportunities that Fine Artists and Craftspeople meet in the world after school, it is often difficult for traditional career placement strategies to work for them. Fine Artists and Craftspeople often need to be creative and innovative in creating their careers and a course in how to survive is sometimes offered in arts schools. The courses are few, and not always run on a regular basis. For some reason too, art students do not always think they need these types of courses until after they graduate.

As stated earlier, many, many books have been written on the subject, and the reader is invited here to peruse this paper’s extensive annotated bibliography and Basic Training reading list. Again, although books are a wonderful resource and reference, again, nothing compares to one on one, artist to artist example, experiential tutoring and guidance. A course that invites artists from multiple career options to share with students is the most successful way to inspire artists to achieve their artistic goals after schooling. Many times it is through these interactions that young artists find intern/assistantships and mentors that are far more meaningful than books.

Projects encouraging and teaching emerging artists to work together to make their own opportunities for self-promotion, exhibition, and evaluation off campus provide much needed hands-on experience.

### Summation

Searching for what was out there for me, my students, my ulterior motive of rocking the world of studio management, and the fine arts department I worked for lead to the development of studio guidelines for the studios I manage (Appendix II), my personal philosophy of artist responsibility (Appendix III) and the design of The Efka Project and The Basic Training Program. The following chapter will describe the development of both the Efka Project and The Basic Training Program and how they lead me to seek a wider vision for my work in this CCT program, higher education administration, and the arts community.

Artist survival is much more complex than financial concerns – what is “practical” for the fine & professional artist? I am interested in a wholistic approach to developing an artist’s career. Feeling strongly about the importance of personal and studio practice as part of a well-rounded and responsible curriculum for all art students and educators has led me to develop a “cradle-to-grave” approach in my management style which eventually I will implement through a program of wider community sharing and involvement. It has become increasingly important and interesting to me to find ways to incorporate responsible, healthy and safe practices in the overall fine and professional arts curriculum. Reaching students, faculty, artists, administration and staff – the whole community – is my goal, to raise awareness through course development and leading by example.

## CHAPTER 3

### BASIC TRAINING

#### A THREE-LEGGED STOOL

The first step in my journey to inspire and facilitate change was to design a ‘program’ – a course/workshop – that incorporated all of the elements of my philosophy of artistic responsibility (Appendix III). In this course, which I’ve named “Basic Training” (Appendix IV), the choice of ‘artist identity and lifestyle’ is examined through a three-tiered definition of the responsibilities associated with that decision/choice. Personal, environmental, and community-based concerns that connect within and outside of an artist’s field are explored through readings, discussion, exercises, and projects. Tools of reflective practice, discipline, cooperation and teamwork are introduced and applied in self-discovery and the uncovering of processes and systems for fulfillment and survival in a competitive and judgmental world – a dimension of being an artist that is seldom addressed wholly in studio or critical studies courses in the Fine and Professional Arts Curriculum.

The course is broken into three (3) five (5)-week focus areas (tiers): personal, environmental, and community responsibilities. Each focus area concentrates on different readings and exercises culminating in class discussions and a brief reflective paper. The goals of the course are to develop a well-rounded foundation in the three areas, bringing an understanding of how to apply the skills and strategies explored, in terms of responsibility and motive, into the real-life experience of artistic pursuit.

Personal: *Ok, I'm an artist... now what?*

Tier one (5 weeks) examines Personal Responsibility– the choices we make when we identify as and embrace, the role of artist, The responsibility to stay healthy in body, mind and spirit– and to make art. Using the “Why–Why Diagram” (Greenwald, 1998) (Appendix V), and continuing with charting a “Personal Strategic Plan” (Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1985,95) (Appendix VI), students are encouraged to discover the definition of, and need for personal responsibility. Development of and implementation of good habits and practice are addressed and argued. The required text for this component of the course varies, as students are asked to choose from a list of six books in the field of self-improve/empowerment and discovery (Appendix IV). Through discussion of the texts, and exercises in freewriting and drawing, students/artists examine how “critical and creative thinking” tools can work for artists. As discoveries – some very personal – are made regarding personal practice, discipline and routine, conversations and dialogue will center on how we stay healthy in our lives: physically, mentally, spiritually – to stay healthy in our art and art making.

Investigation of other choices of practice that enhance and encourage our artistic practice will bring the class to its first reflective paper and a field Trip – to a Holistic Center in the Area to learn more first-hand about a specific area of self care such as yoga or meditation.

The other personal responsibility is to the art making. It is the artist’s responsibility to take information – that which is all around us, unordered – and make some kind of order of it, translate the information – chaos – into a message that the receiver can understand as acceptable and tangible. It is in the personal responsibility as an artist to give the public/viewer an honest product, that art’s role in enhancing our awareness both of ourselves (expanding our perceptual

functioning) and of the world is emphasized. This aspect of personal responsibility will weave throughout this tier of the course in discussions, exercises and activities.

Besides the surroundings of my body (my soul's vessel), and beyond all the theory and responsibility to create – beauty, shock, or otherwise – there is a very real responsibility to the surroundings we inhabit – outer surroundings – home, nature, and community.

### Environment: A Studio of One's Own

Here the course comfortably segues from the personal care/responsibility aspect to the environmental module. What is it an artist really does in the studio – *the smells, the mess, the struggle to control the uncontrollable* – what is the artist's responsibility around the chosen medium?

In the Environmental Responsibility component of the program we begin with a most common concern of artists: *so now I have Practice, Discipline and Routine... where do I do it?* Participants will study the needs a studio fills, how to fill a studio, how to set-up, and to whom we are responsible beside ourselves when working. It is the responsibility of the artist to keep oneself and environment in as good a condition as possible – to not subject oneself or others by one's own irresponsibility to harm or demise. An important topic is that of space acquisition, and where one's discipline dictates the studio be organized. What are the laws and ramifications of work location choices? Where and when is it appropriate to work where you live, or not?

Sharing with peers, mentors, etc., and probing manuals – the required texts being, Ralph Mayer's The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques (1985) or Monona Rossol's The Artist's Complete Health and Safety Guide (2001), and Eric Rudd's, The Art Studio/Loft

Manual: For Ambitious Artists and Creators (2001), discussions and exercises revolve around studio guidelines. How guidelines can work for artists, observing similarities & differences across disciplines, and developing a set of personal studio guidelines is explored through activities and research. Keeping in mind hazards and safety, students will design a blueprint of their own studio being sure to list all the equipment and materials needed to stock and store. A “gallery walk” exercise of the posted designs will allow students the opportunity to share ideas and enhance and adjust their own products and opinions.

How do we stay healthy in our studios – to stay healthy in our art and art making? How do municipal services work and serve us? Other areas of health and safety that effect and impact our artistic practice are looked at as more discussion and research in these areas provides answers, more questions, and application opportunities.

A field trip to a professional/working artist’s or open studio in the area will provide first-hand exposure to a productive and proficient space, while allowing the students to talk with and ask questions of a skilled studio inhabitant.

### Community: From Survival to Thrival

*I’m all set-up and working... where do I go from here?*

To keep our messages heard, our minds open and to contribute to those on whom we must ultimately rely for support is necessary and accomplished through community involvement. This is the part of the course that brings it all full-circle as we embark on acquiring the knowledge of the means by which to “get it out there”.

In reflecting on the previous responsibilities: personal and environmental, and the art

making responsibility we define what “community responsibility” is. How ‘personal’ is survival in terms of gainful employment – or art production? Thriving on the fruits of our labors takes on many guises, and stirs plenty of debate regarding such avenues as for-profit vs. non-profit, when does non-profit actually profit? What is profit? What is survival and “thrival”? We look at how personal our definitions can be, or perhaps how universally defined many are in fact.

The practical requirements for documenting and presenting one’s work is addressed in this tier as students learn the nuts and bolts of slide-taking and other visual documentation of art. Using tools such as listing 30 adjectives about your work and the text by Robert Atkins, ArtSpeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords (1997); writing and editing a resume, cover letter, artist statement, press release, and invite design are assigned as part of the final project: a presentation of your work and as an artist.

Visiting Artists and speakers will address real life issues such as Artist Careers, Art Community Resources, Post-Grad and Artist Communities/Co-ops, Non-Profits, Museums, & Galleries, Critics and the Press, Legal and Financial Issues again providing the class with much desired first-hand knowledge and experiential tutoring.

### Efka Project – Real Art for Real People

In the fall of 2001 I had the opportunity to occupy a gallery in my community. Neighbors asked the owners to re-activate their previously closed space – the community missed the art shows and happenings that took place there in earlier years. The owners did not wish to do the work of running a gallery, and remembering the satisfaction they had in my working with them in the past, offered me the space. Being a full-time graduate student, artist, part-time studio manager and part-time graduate assistant, I was at a loss for the time to invest. Yet I could not

turn my back on the opportunity. It seemed to be *my responsibility* to occupy the space and find a way to make it work. Voila! The Efka Project was born!

Efka: Polish for “Eve”. *Eve* can be the pre-dawn – the night before – for emerging artists. Efka Project offers an opportunity for the public to gain education about, and exposure to, artists in their community who are about to embark on their careers. Efka Project looks for young (in career – not years) artists who are, or have been, pursuing further/formal experience and education as artists. Efka Project offers educational opportunity as artists become involved in the process of selection, installation, gallery day-to-day working, and selling of artwork. Exposure and recognition are the welcomed by-products.

That’s the working mission statement. The first phase of Efka Project began at Art Market Gallery in Jamaica Plain, MA with painting majors/alumni from Massachusetts College of Art. The first exhibit launched on November 1, 2001. New exhibits followed every two to three weeks.

The basic plan is: I direct and curate, Artists (mostly my painting majors from MassArt) approach me for a show, I choose the work – working with them in the selection process, the artist signs a contract with me, I schedule the shows, hang the shows (with the artist), and write press releases. The artist writes an artist’s statement, mails (learning to build a mailing list) invitations, sits gallery hours, converses with the public. We throw a modest reception together, and strike the show together. I talk to the press with the artists when possible as opportunities arise. The project gives the young artist a collaborative gallery experience, an opportunity to practice talking with people about their work, and for many of my students a show off-campus before they graduate.

It is not a \$10,000-a-painting gallery and the artists are encouraged, with my help, to

price the works to remain affordable to the general public. I don't paint to fill my attic, and I share this attitude and philosophy with my students. We make it to get it out there. "Real Art – for Real People" is the theme. The community where the gallery is located has been supportive and grateful for our efforts. I think I acted responsibly on behalf of the community, my fellow artists, and myself in this endeavor. Some people say I'm crazy to have taken on so much – but all agree that it's an important and worthwhile attempt to take advantage of others' generosity for the good of all. How could I not do it?

The project was successful for three seasons – all resulting in sales of artwork. Listed every week in news calendar listings locally, the project has also been written about and reviewed. We also staged several Efka Group Exhibits in other community locations such as Public Libraries and Adult Education Centers.

Recently the owners were inspired to reclaim their space and re-enter the community gallery world. Although it was a sad day for the project when we lost our space and were forced to postpone our fourth season until we find new accommodations, we are all happy to have been a part of resurrecting a viable arts venue in a community that supports and enjoys it. We look forward to finding new space to revitalize and infuse with art and artists. I was particularly moved when the artists came to me and asked if they could find a new home for the project on their own. They wanted to know how to do it themselves, further encouraging and impassioning me to move forward with proposing my Basic Training course to my department and others.

## Summation

Through developing and running the Efka Project, with the help of what that experience has given me in creating and designing the Basic Training Program, I've become a more responsible and responsive artist myself. Since it's worked on me I have also discovered a new voice with which to deliver it to colleagues. I have found that the faculty and administration that I've shared it with are very supportive and recommend its implementation. I have been invited as a Visiting Artist to painting classes to address some topics from the program. I plan to also offer the course as a workshop for working artists through adult education and other community centers.

How all of this evolved from a course for studio and professional artists into a whole campus-wide all-inclusive cultural application and a mini-world scenario for sustainability education on a larger scale is where the next chapter begins.

## CHAPTER 4

### TAKING IT CAMPUS-WIDE

So how, and why, did I make the leap from a program based in the artist studio experience to one of campus-wide application? In Chapter 2 I mentioned attending a sustainability faculty workshop at UMass/Boston, and becoming acquainted with James Eflin of Ball State University. What became clear to me finally through that workshop and his presentation, is that “survival” training for artists is sustainability education. I also re-thought my ideas about mentoring, modeling, and experiential tutoring in terms of ‘wholism’. Why shouldn’t everyone on campus participate in and reap the rewards of healthier and more responsible lifestyles? After all, how could I hope for my students to “get” the “whole” picture if the whole experience of life on campus didn’t reflect what they are being taught?

When I first met Alan Cantara, the Environmental Health and Safety Manager at the RISD I was impressed with his enthusiasm and genuine concern for artists – not just regulations. His manner and system for devising a plan for his campus in what was a new endeavor there was inspiring. Still, I saw his position as highly scientific and out of my league as an art educator and studio manager. It didn’t occur to me then, that implementing a program in sustainability education and campus-wide implementation could be approached from other angles than strictly science. He is a scientist supported by the arts, couldn’t I be an artist supported by science?

I re-considered my synthesis design, visually, with the help of the tools I’d used in earlier classes – “Why–Why Diagram” (Greenwald, 1998) (Appendix V), and “Personal Strategic Plan” (Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1985,95) (Appendix VI), cardstorming, and mapping.

The result was an easier “map” for me to follow (Appendix VII). It made very clear to me that what I was after was institutional change and my own willingness to consider a different approach to my career path. I was also able to make visual maps and connections between Jim Eflin’s diagrams of Sustainability Education, its definitions and issues; and the Basic Training Program’s to help in my illustrating a larger, more inclusive campus-wide proposal.

### Making Change

“If any one idea about leadership has inspired organizations for thousands of years, it’s the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create. One is hard pressed to think of any organization that has sustained some measure of greatness in the absence of goals, values, and missions that become deeply shared throughout the organization...to bind people together around a common identity and sense of destiny.” (Senge, 1994)

I needed to promote my vision for a sustainable campus based on my convictions regarding responsibility. I had made plenty of personal change and used guidance and tools from sources like the books and tools mentioned in previous chapters. If I wanted to even suggest change on the institutional level, let alone make it, I needed to look at tools and strategies developed for change agents.

Peter Senge’s book The Fifth Discipline (1994) and its field book Schools That Learn (2000) are great resources for change agents in organizations, but even as the author admits himself in his Introduction:

“Recognizing that most new ideas in American management get caught up in the dynamics of the fad cycle leads to some sobering questions. What if the time required to understand, apply, and eventually assimilate the new capabilities suggested by a “new idea” is longer than the fad cycle itself?...How can initial tentative explorations and experiments in developing learning capabilities, which inevitably will meet with a mixture of success and failure, lead to an ongoing learning process that continually

increases capability?”

I needed to look at his book and those by others (see bibliography) as resources and models to use cafeteria-style, but not necessarily as blueprints for success. The laws of the Fifth Discipline are enlightening: *Today's problems come from yesterday's solution; The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back; Behavior grows better before it grows worse; The easy way out usually leads back in; The cure can be worse than the disease; Faster is slower; Cause and effect are not so closely related in time and space; Small changes can produce big results—but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious; You can have your cake and eat it too—but not at once; Dividing an elephant in half does not produce two small elephants; and There is no blame.* Sound familiar? Many of these “laws” did to me, and I realized that hearing them again from another point of view helped me to appreciate their essence and transfer the knowledge to my situation and circumstances. It was scary when I built up too specific of a long-term idea of a plan of action in my mind. I needed to keep it simple, and rely on my own experiences as resources too.

It was experience that I learned a lesson about changing attitudes with baby steps. I have made significant changes and contributions in my job as studio manager. Again, no one had ever done the job of painting studio manager at my institution before me. Also, no one in my department knew exactly what to expect from the position they so passionately lobbied for. The job description was vague, and loosely based on other studio managers'. I came on to the position right after commencement – everyone left me for the summer with a long “wish/to do” list; 6 programs I knew nothing about running in my areas; filthy, run-down, neglected studios; and no office or budget. I was hired at half-time status, and had three months to prepare for the fall semester. It was at that time that I took a deep breath and made a personal commitment to

myself and the job – the position and office would never take hold without visibility and a strong foothold to begin. I committed to working full-time (at half-time salary) for one-year to ensure the success of my efforts and department. I was met with resistance to change when everyone came back to the campus and department, but I knew that to be part of the human condition and applied myself to being patient and tolerant while maintaining procedures. I visited every studio and every class that met in my area on their first day of classes each semester – making for extremely long ‘first weeks’ of school for me – to explain and discuss the new Studio Guidelines and the “how comes?” of procedures and protocol. It was a way of opening doors and a route to building communication and trust. I hired and trained painting majors to be studio monitors – empowering them to become more invested in the department, and mentor their peers. It worked, over time, and today my office operates fully and smoothly with ample support.

In retrospect, I experienced that what worked best was baby-steps – small, not always the way I wanted, and working with others to help them understand that we were not creating more work, we were just changing how we worked. So, it was no surprise to me to read about “A Shift of Mind” in Senge’s book. Through some attitudinal adjustments I was able to garner some support and interest in my outside endeavors as I began to include colleagues and students in them (i.e.: Efka Project, Mission Hill Artist Collective, Annual Campus Staff Show, and Annual MassArt Auction).

### Working with Others

I enjoy working with others and through my projects and position have found outlets for my undertakings. It was through my interactions with the artists in my area, and my course work

in CCT that I developed my course and discovered the desire in me to take it to a wider audience. To do this, I needed to think about working with others from other perspectives and consider organizational politics and protocol.

Due to the political atmosphere in our state government's treatment of higher education re-organization, I took note of, and paid attention to the ways in which higher administrators at my institution were responding and preparing. Major administrative changes occurred, my supervisor was promoted – but before leaving encouraged me to think “bigger”, and “get my credential”. I made myself available to strategic and other planning committees on campus. I shared my ideas, and some of my graduate work with others.

I visited, at the suggestion of my Dialogue teacher and reader Allyn Bradford, the Synectics Company both at their website (<http://www.synecticsworld.com>) and their Cambridge, MA offices. Over the years they have come to represent a very particular and effective approach to “creative teamwork”. Many consulting movements today are also promoting teamwork; another that I looked at was Future Search, and the book by Vincent Nolan, The Innovator's Handbook (1989). Bringing together diversity is a fundamental element of facilitating innovative thinking. A large part of what these companies do is help organizations to find new ways of ensuring that all functions work together in harmony, creating, innovating and implementing. I thought this would be most helpful and encouraged two community groups I sit on Boards of to apply with me for pro-bono workshops. I figured I could learn the system through experiencing it with them (and I thought it would benefit these non-profits) and then bring it to my campus meetings. Both groups flatly refused my suggestion, and both groups' responses wreaked of fear. Ah, resistance to change is a powerful force!

I had to re-visit my earlier realizations about baby-steps, and think about other resources

I could apply. Many happen to be the same things I was investigating in CCT i.e.: “Why–Why Diagram” (Greenwald, 1998) (Appendix V), and “Personal Strategic Plan” (Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1985,95) (Appendix VI), and implementing in my course design for Basic Training. Why not try these with my committees? With colleague and fellow CCT-er Paul Dobbs, we offered our recommendations to the strategic and other committees on campus. Still, no one’s biting.

In the meantime, I was hearing from people around campus – people I had been sharing my ideas and work with. An email from a supportive colleague/friend said:

“I brought up your name at the space planning committee meeting this week because the discussion had lead to wholistic approaches to studio-based curriculum and managing studios. If the school stays afloat, I think we will be seeing more cross-departmental and interdisciplinary studio spaces. This is a refection of not only economics but philosophical shifts occurring in curriculum throughout the institution.

This is just a heads-up. I thought you would be interested in knowing that the work you are doing has been noticed around the school and that a more centralized vision of studio safety is most certainly in the air.”

Recently, we were informed at a studio managers’ meeting of a conference in health & safety being planned at RISD for the fall of 2003 by Alan Cantara, about how interested in the conference the Academic Vice-president is, and that they were sending the Facilities Director to meet with him. Others have told me that my name has come up in other meetings on campus concerning my work... but it seems like other people are picking up & running with what I've been hoping to work on. I’m frustrated by my own impatience at waiting for and finding the opportunities to be allowed to apply my ideas. Should I be nervous? Will my work be recognized? What's next?

## Support from Within

I mentioned my fears and concerns to my cohort at UMass and to a couple of trusted friends. It was suggested that what I needed was a crew – “LEW’s Crew” who could help put forth my plans and ideas as mine.

I made an appointment with a friend and top administrator on campus and was advised that it was now time to talk to the President of the college. I developed a PowerPoint presentation to make my points concerning my proposal for implementing Wholistic Sustainability Education on our campus. I met with the President, gave my presentation, and made my arguments. Although supportive, I was advised to take my ideas to the Vice-Presidents, the Facilities Director, and the Strategic Planning Committee – that this was important for them to see. These were people who already knew about my work, have heard from me informally, but hadn’t seen any formal presentations or proposals.

Sometimes things happen without us planning for them. I was out of sorts about what seemed to be going around in circles and other plans on campus moving forward. I was trying to figure out who to approach first while the Chair for the Strategic Planning Committee passed by my office several times. Just like the way “sustainability” had worked its way into and invaded my project, she was invading my space – my head – with her presence, and before I could think my way out of it I was at her door, presentation in hand, asking for a minute of her time. She obliged me, viewed my proposal and insisted I bring it to committee. The “committee” consists of department heads, faculty, deans, and administrators. Was this LEW’s Crew? All responded supportively, though they didn’t give me much feedback. Perhaps a digestive period is necessary. It did empower me to approach the Vice-President of Academic Affairs with the same

presentation and a request from her to share it with the Facilities Director. At first I was apprehensive about giving away too much to too many, but now I'm confident knowing that many know my work, and can recognize my language. I'm hopeful and optimistic about things moving forward, even if slowly at first, and learning more about institutional politics and positioning in working for and creating change.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PROPOSAL

#### A CASE FOR WHOLISTIC SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION FOR ARTISTS

The following is the script for the proposal as delivered with a PowerPoint presentation (within Appendix IX).

The idea for implementing wholistic sustainability education at MassArt evolved from my designing a course, which I call Basic Training, as part of my graduate work in CCT at UMass/Boston that aspired to meeting the needs of my students in the area of studio management and health and safety issues. As I developed the Basic Training Program and mapped the design of my thesis project as a combination of the Program design and a practitioner's narrative, the shape of something larger took hold.

First it is necessary to look at the very foundation of the three-tiered Program in what I define as the Three Responsibilities of Artists: 1. Personal – to stay healthy in body, mind, and spirit – and to make art. 2. Environmental – To keep oneself and environment in as good a condition as possible – to not subject oneself or others by one's own irresponsibility to harm or demise. 3. Community – To keep our messages heard, our minds open, and to contribute to those on whom ultimately we must rely on for support through community involvement. The Basic Training Program is a wholistic program in the fine and professional arts focusing on the studio experience. There is nothing that compares to one-on-one, artist-to-artist example – experiential tutoring – and guidance. The program emphasizes these principles and responsibilities through 1. Encouraging personal development practice – incorporating mental, physical, and spiritual

growth and nurturing; 2. Teaching healthy and safe studio and life habits, through modeling, a class/workshop, space acquisition and outfitting strategies; 3. Using visiting artists from multiple career options to share and inspire achievement of artistic goals after completing school. Projects like the Efka Project encourage and teach emerging artists to work together to make their own opportunities for self-promotion, exhibition, and evaluation. We do not create to fill our attics.

Basic Training connects to Sustainability Education. We cannot make art while contributing to environmental destruction – an unhealthy environment will make us sick. Ailing artists cannot make art. Healthy habits in our practice, work & workplace leads to healthy living.

Greening campuses = Greening MassArt. University leaders around the globe and across the country have joined together to promote the idea and implementation of campus “greening” through mutually agreed declarations and the creation of coalitions of faculty, students, staff, and administrators representing colleges and universities in concerted efforts toward those ends. (Talloires, Kyoto, Halifax, & Swansea Declarations, CRE Copernicus Charter, etc.).

Sustainability Education is locally & globally responsible and necessary. “ A widely accepted conceptual model presents sustainability as a quest toward three interrelated objectives: 1) environmental integrity; 2) economic vitality; and 3) social equity. We believe people should be encouraged to begin thinking about sustainability from any of these three perspectives. We should engage people “where they are at” and incorporate the thinking of many viewpoints as we “move toward the center” of the sustainability triangle. “ (Gerber, et. al., 2002)

It was at a workshop for infusing sustainability into the curriculum at UMass/Boston, that I first made the connection between Basic Training and Sustainability Education. The presenting speaker, James Eflin from Ball State University illustrated the three points of Sustainability as three points on a triangle: Economic, Environmental, Societal. The three “points” of Basic Training are: Personal, Environmental, Community. If one lines up the two triangles they practically interlock. Basic Training connects to Sustainability Education to produce a

Responsible, Efficient, and Healthy environment.

How do we implement wholistic sustainability education at MassArt?

There are many ways we can involve everyone on campus. Some suggestions are:

Staff Development through

- workshops for faculty and studio managers
- training for key personnel
- support materials (which besides being manuals and other printed materials can also be people)

Student Development through

- Basic Training Program
- projects like the Efka Project
- consortium projects
- interactive website

Build Commitment through

- create/appoint a Wholistic Sustainability Office(r) (ME?)
- create incentives (avoid penalties)
- environmental action teams ie.: Students for a Sustainable Campus (with Student Government Association and MassPIRG), paper reduction committee, or any type of suggestion like this from community members.
- Encourage interdisciplinary involvement getting departments to work together to help solve problems and create opportunities.
- Celebrate successes – when something works out well make sure everyone hears about it!

## Encourage Studio Managers to take the Lead

- Compensation for “first day” class presentations

(similar to what I presently do in FA2D, see Chapter 4) Create Graduate Assistant

## Positions working with studio managers

- Create Internships for our students within MassArt

(industrial design, architectural planning)

(In the painting studios we have a physically challenged student confined to a wheelchair. She is an honors student who wishes to paint larger than the area she can manage from within her physical and mechanical constraints. Working with the Director of Affirmative Action and Civil Rights (DAACR), I suggested we create a “Challenge” to our Architectural and Industrial Design students to create a portable apparatus to address accessibility issues for physically challenged painters. She “bought” the idea, offering a monetary award, and after creating a jury of faculty, Facility Director, DAACR, department Chairs, the student and me, we made a decision on which design to use. We hope this leads to more such projects and a more accommodating campus and studio experience for all.

- Work-Study Support
- Studio participation requirements attached to studio agreements
  - (enhances “trickle-up” effect – or cradle to grave, as upper classmen mentor younger students) The benefits of all of these interlocking “points” are:
- happy students and employees
- opportunity to support diverse programs
- streamlining accountability and dependability

- more options for better spending
- efficient and cost-effective savings
- better work conditions
- better study conditions
- enthusiastic and supportive alumni
- impressed and supportive public
- visibility through dissemination as MassArt becomes a leader and model in the field.

I offer this proposal seeking your consideration, support and recommendation. I hope I will find the opportunity to be instrumental in the implementation and application of these ideas at MassArt. Thank you.

## CHAPTER 6

### ONE STEP FURTHER

After designing my presentation for MassArt, I had occasion to attend the follow-up, or Part II, of the UMass/Boston sustainability workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together people from many areas and disciplines at the university who attended the first meeting, Part I, to present current syllabi that they “infused” with sustainability issues. Since my Basic Training Syllabus (Appendix IV) was already highly infused, I decided to see if I could use it as a model to design a course for CCT students and upper level undergrads for considering how they could infuse these principles and topics in varied arenas, i.e. workplace, teaching, management, home, etc.

The results of my efforts were pleasing to me (Appendix VIII) and I put together a PowerPoint presentation (within Appendix IX) of my course proposal to show that group. It is my hope that the CCT program at UMass/Boston will in fact be able to work my course into their offerings in the near future. I enjoy the diversity this program (CCT) offers and would welcome the opportunity to stay involved here through teaching and mentoring.

APPENDIXES ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR – Not included here due to file size.

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