

Investigation

For my husband's last birthday, I bought him every book I could find that was published about Airstream trailers. (We've had ours for a year now!) One of them, *Wanderlust: Airstream at 75* by Russ Banham, told the story of Wally Byam, the founder of Airstream trailers. Byam synthesized form and function in his streamlined, aerodynamic silver trailers that have become American icons.

Reading *Wanderlust*, I was surprised and impressed by Byam's spirit of curiosity, a trait I believe is crucial for meaningful investigation, whether of the world of art or the world at large. In addition to running his company, Byam personally led caravans of Airstreams all over the world, motivated by his credo of "See more, do more, live more!" Is that not the enthusiasm and investigative spirit we strive to develop in our students?

How can we best apply this approach and foster meaningful investigations of art in our students? I believe that meaningful investigation is driven by curiosity. Whether experimenting with concepts, ideas, or media, students' best investigations may be fueled by curiosity, and in turn motivated by a teacher who is enthusiastic and encouraging.

So, what can art teachers do to foster their own curiosity and delight in the investigation of ideas and processes, especially considering so many of us (me included) are the lone art teacher in our school?

My first recommendation is that you take time in your life to make art to feed your own artistic spirit. You can work on your own, exhibit your work, and/or take classes. Students are fascinated to see that their art teacher makes art and shares it with them. When my students

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express amazement that I can draw, I always ask them "Don't you think I should be able to, so I can teach you?"

My second recommendation is to join your state art education association and attend its annual conferences. You'll meet other like-minded teachers who share your state mandates and have opportunities to hear from acclaimed art educators and artists and attend your choice of multiple presentations. Many state organizations have local chapters, through which you may more easily and frequently participate.

If possible, also join the National Art Education Association (NAEA) and attend a national convention. I still remember how I felt arriving at my first national convention and discovering I had over 800 presentations to choose from! For example, the NAEA convention in New Orleans this March offers more than 1000 presentations, sixty workshops, and 200 commercial exhibitors. I

know it is expensive to go to NAEA, but it is worth it to try one fairly close to you and share a room with three other teachers (you won't be spending much time in your room anyway). Whether you go to state or national conventions, you will return home rejuvenated with new ideas and lessons to share and investigate with your students.

My third recommendation is to travel, with an open mind, whenever you can, whether to a nearby art museum or a far-off country. Travel, spurred by curiosity, broadens your perspective on the world as it encourages further investigation.

My most recent student-teacher, Jessica Nickerson, exemplified this enthusiastic investigative spirit. I'll leave you with her enthusiastic, characteristic response to students about their ideas or questions: "Go for it!" Renew your investigative spirit and share it with your students. Enthusiasm is contagious!

Nancy Walkup

Nancy Walkup, Editor



Nancy and former student-teacher Jessica Nickerson.