

# NSEADcreate – case study #1

Who are we? Why do we do what we do?  
Why do we do it this way?

Zoe Coughlan teaches Visual Art at Hong Kong Academy (HKA), a non-profit, independent world school in Hong Kong, with 550 students from 3-18 years old. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, on 3 February 2020 Hong Kong closed school campuses to students. The following day HKA launched fully synchronous lessons for Secondary School students. In this article, Zoe shares some underlying principles behind a successful online international baccalaureate sculpture unit with a mixed-ability class of G9 and G10 students (years 10 and 11, ages 14-16).



## What were we trying to achieve through this unit?

Throughout our transition to online learning the main focus has been to stay true to our mission as a diverse, inclusive school offering a rigorous, joyful education. This has meant stripping back units to their essential inquiry questions, which for this unit was: 'Artists choose their materials and use them as a tool for expression.' Secondly, we wanted to stay true to our aim to introduce students to sculpture in this semester. Thirdly, the exploration needed to be feasible for all students to access, wherever they are and whatever resources they have access to. Finally, we recognised from the get-go the importance of offering students opportunities for joyful, off-screen engagement with materials.

## How did we achieve this online?

Inspired by an article in *AD* magazine, #26, which referenced Richard Serra's *Verb List* (1967–68), I used this as a starting point for developing a series of exploratory lessons where students could make use of any materials at home (paper, yarn, tin foil, leaves, drinks cans...), transforming them through repetitive processes (fold, tear, crumple etc). This gave students maximum flexibility to use what they had on hand, and encouraged concentration on the transformative potential of the process. Students also explored El Anatsui's work, before reflecting on these initial experiences and referencing an interview with Serra in *Art21*. In this article he speaks of avoiding the 'after image' of an idea. Students continued to develop their sculptural ideas independently, whilst also researching other artists such as Janine Antoni, Judith Scott and Dan Elborne – these artists take materials and a process-based approach to making work. Conversations have in turn focused on the metaphoric associations of certain materials and actions.



Lessons were planned and delivered using Google Classroom. We also used YouTube videos, and EdPuzzle to create quizzes to check for comprehension.

Critiques on work-in-progress were conducted by uploading work to a shared Padlet and commenting first in text, then via Google Meet. Throughout the process I 'met' students 1:1 through Google Hangouts, recording these meetings and class instructions using Screencastify (which links seamlessly into Classroom). I know we are exceptionally fortunate to have students with laptops and a well-resourced and supportive Tech department at our school.

### **What were the outcomes?**

In terms of student work (which is on-going), there has been a range of outcomes from stitched leaves to knitted plastic bags to origami cranes and more. Student progress is much slower online (budget for double the amount of time to do anything), but engagement has been high. The task was accessible enough for lower performing students or those needing more support, whilst also being open-ended enough to enable gifted and talented students to extend themselves. The conceptual opportunities were rich as well.

### **Student reflections:**

'Even though the idea of sticking to only one verb seems to minimize the options, it actually expands your thinking to a huge variety of options within that verb.'

'Through this whole process, I was able to get more comfortable just working with the materials and allowing myself to let go of the "after image" when it came to my final sculpture – this is where I had the most success.'

### **Thoughts as a reflective practitioner**

The initial shift to online learning was incredibly challenging for me and my colleagues as it shook our identities as teachers and forced us to address three key questions: Who are we? Why do we do what we do? Why do we do it this way? Learning to teach online is like being a new teacher again: All your teacher 'Spidey senses' are stripped away, your pacing is shot, you are flying the plane as you build it. And yet, what an opportunity to refine what is most important to you as an educator: What do you want to recreate in your online classroom, and what can you let fall away? Is there a way we can use technology to not simply substitute, but to augment, modify or even redefine what we do (SAMR model framework for tech integration from Dr. Ruben Puentedura). How can I connect with my students and deepen their thinking? What is my role in fostering community and creativity in these challenging times?

### **Invitation to share**

If you take some of these ideas and use them, please tag us in Instagram using @HongKongAcademy and hashtags #hkacademy #hka\_onlinelearning: We'd love to see!

