BYRAM HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
ARMONK, NEW YORK

Authors: Lila Horn, David McMichael

Title of Project: *Critiques using Google Social Media*

Year: 2015-2016

School/Grade: Byram Hills High School/9-12

SUMMARY OF *INVESTIGATORS OF PRACTICE* ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Context:
We teach art at Byram Hills High School. This year we focused on our AP Photography and AP Graphic Design classes with students in the 11th and 12th grade. Our research this year was an extension of our work from last year. In 2014-15, we focused on how we could encourage our students to think more conceptually as they developed their AP portfolios. We researched methods to help foster investigative thinking such as modeling to our students, critiquing, conferencing and small group work. One problem that we continue to experience is the amount of time required to thoroughly complete whole class critiques. Another problem is that we rarely hear all students' voices during a traditional critique; a few students usually dominate the conversation.

Action Plan:
Our question this year was "How can students use social media to post their Concentration ideas and images and then gather peer feedback through a critique process?" We chose this question because we believed that social media might be more time-efficient and inclusive.

We initially talked with our Technology Department to learn about different social media platforms and decided to try Google+ Communities. This social media platform enables teachers to create a closed classroom community in which students can post images of their artwork and comment on each other's art. We then spoke with two colleagues who had classroom experience using Google+ Communities. They helped us navigate the process of setting up Google Communities for our individual classes.

Our first critiques using Google Communities were informative. We learned that students needed clear expectations regarding the quality of critique responses. Without guidelines the responses were simplistic and unhelpful. For example, "I like it," "Cool colors!," "nice". We discussed our disappointment at our next Investigators of Practice meeting and received good suggestions from our colleagues. We were shown a Warm and Cool Feedback resource that contained comment prompts. We used these warm and cool prompts in our next round of Google Communities critiques.

Links to Resources: These resources were helpful in exploring guidelines and applying various techniques in Google Classroom throughout the year:
Warm vs Cool Feedback
Looking at Student Work
AP College Website - Sample Concentration Portfolios
Leading Critique in Art Classes
Art Classes Publish their Work on Google+
The Open Art Class
Westosha ADV Photo

Results:

STUDENT SURVEY:
Students were given a [survey](#) after completing the first 5-day long traditional class critique in October prior to the introduction of Google+Communities critiques. From student responses, we became cognizant that it was important that the critique process not take up too much class time, allow for a situation where every student is able to make comments, create an environment where students are focused on the task, and have on-going critiques throughout the year to allow students to develop their ideas.

AP ART GOOGLE+ COMMUNITY FIRST CRITIQUE:
Following are the directions posted to AP students:
- Post 2 Concentration artworks & your Concentration idea
- Comment on each student's post

Student Concentration Idea: "My concentration is abstract portraits. I used two different styles in each piece depending on the colors and positions of the picture to make the viewer interested.

Student work and sample of student comments:
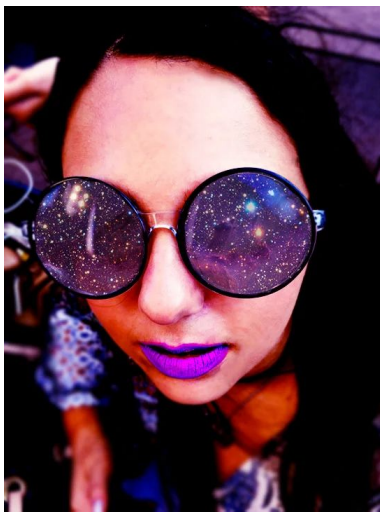
Student #1: "this is really cool"

Student #2: "NO CRITICISM KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK"

Student #3: "I like the technique used to create the texture of your 2nd photo. xox see u at work"

Student #4: "both are so cool the galaxy goes really well with the colors in the first one"

Teacher Reflection on first Google+ Critique:
After reading through the student comments, we concluded that the students were responding too generally and were lacking criticism that is specific and constructive. We shared our experience with our colleagues and the use of Warm & Cool Feedback method was suggested as a way to structure our social media critiques.

AP ART GOOGLE+ COMMUNITY SECOND CRITIQUE WITH WARM/COOL FEEDBACK:
Following are the directions posted to AP students in a Class Critique Google+ Community:

DIRECTIONS TO STUDENTS:
- Post 2 Concentration artworks & your Concentration idea
- Comment on each student's post using Warm and Cool feedback prompts

Warm feedback prompts
"I really like how you..."
"You did a great job at..."
"It was clear that you worked hard on..."
"It was really interesting when you..."

Cool feedback prompts
"You may want to consider..."
"I noticed that you.... It may be more useful to..."
"Have you thought about..."
"It was unclear to me when you..."

Student Concentration Idea: "I am interested in exploring the idea of glass objects. I can show reflection with glass objects or I can put different colors behind/ in the objects and different lighting to show how they can be distorted."

Student work with sample of student comments:

"I like the use of lighting, but maybe next time try and create more contrast."

"I really like the mood of these photographs but maybe next time shoot the subject at different angles to change up the photos a little bit."

"I think its very interesting concentration, but maybe try and show that you're looking through glass, like half the image is the view without and half is looking through the glass."


"I really like the concept of this photo, you could try this same idea but maybe with a more interesting background."

"I like the direction you went with your concentration, next time you could try broken or shattered glass"..

Student Concentration Idea: "My concentration is about mental illnesses: schizophrenia, depression and anorexia."

Student work with sample of student comments:
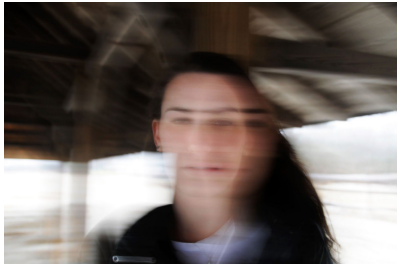
"I really like the way you copy and paste things on top of each other to create a slightly chaotic scene, maybe try black and white in a few pictures?"

"I really like the idea of these photos and the editing, maybe next time you could shoot from the perspective of the outside world?"

"I like that you made the third picture blurry because it demonstrates how schizophrenics are disoriented and confused . For the first picture maybe make it in black and white and keep "worthless" in red to show depression and how that is the main feeling."

"I like your use of 3 pictures into one, but maybe next time try and make the middle one black and white?"

CRITIQUE REFLECTION:
Following is a list of questions that AP Art students responded to regarding the Google Communities Critique:

1. Reflect on your experience of looking at and commenting on your peers' Concentration themes and artworks.
2. Reflect on your experience of reading comments about your artwork.
3. Reflect on the overall value of our Google Community critique.
4. Make a suggestion on how to improve or change this critique. You might consider critique methods that you have experienced in other classes.

Student Responses:

"I think that by commenting on the artwork of my peers, I got a good idea of what everyone in the class was focusing on, as well as strengths and weaknesses."

"I think that the critiques are valuable, but the process is time consuming."

"I thought that it was cool seeing everyones art. Sometimes artwork we make and that isn't printed out or submitted to our portfolios goes unrecognized and this allowed us to showcase our first pieces."

"Maybe you could not be required to comment on every single persons artwork, possibily just a few instead. Also, I found that responding to the comments took up unnecessary time, instead we can just read them."

"I found it exceptionally helpful to gather others ideas about my artwork to improve upon my work."

" I thought looking and commenting on our peers works were very beneficial. It gave me a good idea of all their concentration ideas and i was able to help them with ideas."

"I thought that by reading comments I was able to understand my strengths and weaknesses as viewed from an outside force."

"First we should go around and explain what our concentration is to each other so that when we go to comment on the computer people are not confused. "

"Our Google Community is beneficial because we all benefit from the critiques of our peers in order to improve our techniques."

" I thought that hearing what different people had to say about my artwork was very helpful, because it gave me a different way to look at my pieces."

" I think it is very important, not only for the ideas but just as a place to share all of our ideas."

"I feel that people's comments have helped me with both the technical and conceptual elements of my art."

"I think that the community is advantageous and helps people with their confidence in their art. I know people's complimentary comments on my boosted my self esteem in art."

IMPLICATIONS:

Using the social media platform of Google+ Communities was tremendously beneficial to student critiques. It enabled students to comment and receive feedback about concentration ideas, compositional design and techniques. In addition, the social environment of the class became closer as students enjoyed the sharing aspect of social media.

As teachers, we required each student to comment on every class member's art and we recorded the number of responses using tally marks. Some students reflected on this requirement indicating that it was too time-intensive and suggested that we limit the number of students that each student is required comment on. We are undecided regarding this suggestion; although it is somewhat time-intensive (most students needed more than a full period to complete all comments), it is way more efficient than a full-class critique which could consume nearly a full week of classes.

It was beneficial to receive feedback from out colleagues as their suggestion to use Warm and Cool prompts improved the specificity and constructive criticisms of student comments.

What new questions do you have?
Is it practical to use Google+ for other art classes?
It is time-intensive for a teacher to tally each student comment and response. Is there a more efficient way for the teacher to read and tally each student comment and response?