

**TEACH  
ING  
ART**

**CORE RULES**

## Introduction

This year marks my fifteenth year of teaching at an art academy. I was a different person when I started and I was certainly a different teacher. I taught the way I was taught: through lectures, slideshows and a set of well-thought out assignments. A broadcast model, basically. I felt an obligation to transmit, to fill the time and space that I was paid for. Here's how Parker Palmer, teacher and writer on education, describes it in *The Courage to Teach*:

Like most professionals, I was taught to occupy space, not open it: after all, we are the ones who know, so we have an obligation to tell others about it! (...) A not-so-small voice within me insists that if I am not filling all the available space with my own knowledge, I am not earning my keep.

I tried to earn my keep with intricate slideshows, detailed notes and comprehensive readers. I labored over these in the hopes of inspiring young art students to bring their best selves to the work. And sometimes, for some students, this worked, but I also gazed at a lot of zoned out and only half-interested faces. And after a few rounds of teaching the same course, I zoned out as well. I didn't care for the material anymore. I knew it all and I knew what I thought about it, what I could say about it but I had no interest in saying it.

When the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman left TV writing rooms in favor of the more solitary pursuit of writing screenplays for feature films, he faced a similar problem: "It was just me in a room and everything I thought was familiar because I was thinking it. I couldn't surprise myself."

I wasn't surprising myself. I wasn't discovering anything new, I was regurgitating what I thought was fundamental to what I taught. Kaufman's solution? He took two separate story ideas and forced them into one script: "It was a conscious decision to try and duplicate that process of writing with someone else, but doing it by myself."

I tried something similar, but instead of bringing the collective experience to the individual process I went the other way, from lecturing to (or maybe at) my students to learning with them. It was by no means an instant turn-around: there were a lot of failed attempts and I am sure

there will be more in the future. This document though, for what it's worth, is about what is going right.

### What is an art education?

Art Education (AE) is a type of education where students generate stories through shared imagination. The core concept behind AES is similar to imagination games you might have played when you were young. Remember playing 'house' using dolls or action figures, and other simple games of pretend? AES introduces structure to this process, helps students establish goals, track abstract information and resolve conflicts. Rule systems and randomizers help adults make sense of what comes naturally to most children.

I've been interested in co-creation of the curriculum for at least half of my teaching career and I tried a lot of things to get it going. Choosing themes together with students, trying to align their interests and hobbies with the classes, asking them to contribute to the reading material, etcetera. It sometimes worked. Not a lot though. It was hard getting them to lean in instead of lean back. As disinterested as

I had become in lecturing, as reluctant the students were to put themselves forward.

Then I discovered Tabletop Roleplaying Games (TTRPGs). If you've never heard of those you might think it's something awfully nerdy. And you'd be right. The thing those kids are playing in *Stranger Things*? It's a TTRPG. In fact, it is the most famous one, *Dungeons and Dragons*. It's the first one I ever played.

In most TTRPGs, players are in control of a character, the same way you would be in a video game. They determine the actions the character takes and when the outcome of what they make up is uncertain or risky, they roll dice. Usually, one of the players is the Game Master (GM). They represent the rest of the game: they describe the world the game is played in and inhabit all the other characters (and - depending on genre - the monsters, aliens, demons, etc), often called Non-Player Characters (NPCs).

I was aware of the existence of TTRPGs and suspected that there was a good chance that I would like them, but it wasn't until one of my close friends (and fellow teacher) started hosting a game that I played one. I was hooked right away.

Here we were: thirty- and forty-somethings, gathered around a table and making up a story that felt engaging and fresh and most of all... that belonged to us all. It was a collective effort. It was co-creation in action. And it felt easy.

I wanted that for my classes, in some shape or form, this idea of discovering a world together. And I wondered if I could take principles from TTRPGs into the classroom.

To be clear: I wasn't looking to gamify teaching and learning. I also don't think that the game element is the most interesting thing about TTRPGs. I don't think it is for most players. Rolling dice, as fun as it is, is not what you're doing most of the time. And it's not what you're really there for, the game elements are a way to do something else.

In a TTRPG you usually use dice to determine the outcome of actions that are uncertain: when a player does something risky or the GM also doesn't know the outcome. An example of the use of dice in the latter are random tables. These are tables on which you roll for story elements the GM wants to determine themselves: from weather type to random treasure, from NPC names to their behavior. This is a way for the GM to surprise themselves, in a similar vein to how Kaufman describes it. The dice in this set are meant for the use of random tables in generating assignments, help formulate feedback, etc. A way for the teacher to surprise themselves, to get out of their own imagination. More on them in Appendix B.

Almost every TTRPG rulebook starts off with a short statement defining what a TTRPG is. In fact, you have already read such a text on the opposite page, only with the words 'Tabletop Roleplaying Game' replaced by 'Art Education' and 'players' by 'students'. It still kind of works though, right?

Anyway, I want to share another one of those texts here to get to what I think the core of TTRPGs is. It comes from the indie but influential classic *Apocalypse World*, by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker:

You probably know this already: roleplaying is a conversation. You and the other players go back and forth, talking about these fictional characters in their fictional circumstances doing whatever it is they do. Like any conversation, you take turns, but it's not like taking turns, right? Sometimes you talk over each other, interrupt,

build on each others' ideas, monopolize and hold forth. All fine.

These rules mediate the conversation. They kick in when someone says some particular thing, and they impose constraints on what everyone should say after. Makes sense, right?

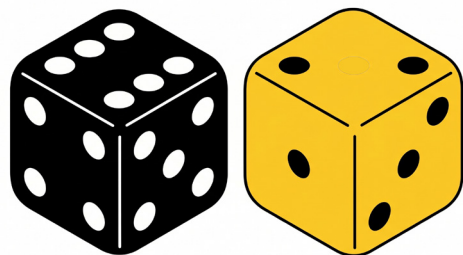
There are many TTRPGs, but in essence they all are this: a structured conversation. Most of the time spent at the table is not rolling dice, it is spent talking. It is talking in all the modes the Bakers describe in their definition.

In an episode of the TTRPG podcast *Dice Exploder*, game designer Jay Dragon offers that we can and should consider TTRPGs an art form and then he defines the core of that art form: "In the same way paintings are often concerned with how we see, I think RPGs are oftentimes concerned with how we communicate."

And that is what this box is about. I want to see what principles and techniques I can take from roleplaying games and apply to teaching in service of communication creating agency. I don't intend to translate every aspect of TTRPGs to the classroom. This text offers some principles and thoughts that I have managed to explore and implement during the last year. It is by no means exhaustive, nor is it definitive. It's, you know, a way to start the conversation.

A lot of games offer a starter set of some sort to teach you the game. They often offer some stripped down version of the rules and some basic material like maps and starting adventures. If you're lucky, they come with custom dice.

This is *Teaching Art*, the starter set.



## How to play

*Dungeons and Dragons* (DnD), besides being the most famous TTRPG, is also one of the biggest ones in volume. There are separate books for players, game masters (called Dungeon Masters in DnD), monsters, settings, books for additional features and character options and a whole slew of adventures. Not to mention all the versions of the game that have existed through the decades and third party material. For all its pages of rules, regulations, advice and options though, its basic description of the game is quite short:

The play of the DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS game unfolds according to this basic pattern.

1. The DM describes the environment. The DM tells the players where their adventurers are and what's around them, presenting the basic scope of options that present themselves (how many doors lead out of a room, what's on a table, who's in the tavern, and so on).

2. The players describe what they want to do. Sometimes one player speaks for the whole party, saying, "We'll take the east door," for example. Other times, different adventurers do different things: one adventurer might search a treasure chest while a second examines an esoteric symbol engraved on a wall and a third keeps watch for monsters. The players don't need to take turns, but the DM listens to every player and decides how to resolve those actions.

Sometimes, resolving a task is easy. If an adventurer wants to walk across a room and open a door, the DM might just say that the door opens and describe what lies beyond. But the door might be locked, the floor might hide a deadly trap, or some other circumstance that might make it challenging for an adventurer to complete a task. In those cases, the DM decides what happens, often relying on the roll of a die to determine the results of an action.

3. The DM narrates the results of the adventurers' actions. Describing the results often leads to another deci-

sion point, which brings the flow of the game right back to step 1.

To make it even shorter, as my first GM did, you get this:

1. The GM presents (a part of) the world. “This is what you see and this is what is happening.” Sometimes it involves an immediate challenge.
2. The players say what they want to do. Sometimes they need to roll dice to see if they can.
3. The GM says: “Because of what you did (and time passing), this is now the world...” And you go back to step 2.

This basic game loop is how the conversation of TTRPGs is structured. It’s a simple back and forth, but it is a powerful one. It creates whole worlds and stories within those worlds. And it gives agency to all the people involved. It is the basic game loop that I want my classes to be like.

1. The teacher presents a part of the world to the students. Sometimes they pose a challenge.
2. The students say what they want to do. Sometimes the outcome is uncertain.
3. The teacher presents what the world looks like after their actions and presents the options now available to them. Then we go back to step 2.

The word ‘world’ can be read as ‘artistic discipline’ here. But it can also be read as ‘subject’, ‘technique’, ‘genre’, ‘sub-discipline’, etc. It can be very specific or quite broad. I’ve taught courses called ‘sound’, but I’ve also taught ‘listening as artistic research’. I’ve taught ‘writing’ and I have taught ‘free verse poetry’. Whatever the scope of your course, it’s your world. You also want it to feel like a world, a place where students can enter and be and interact. The GM determines what is relevant about the world as well as about what the characters do. But they don’t determine the whole outcome and every action. In art education, the teacher determines what the borders of a subject are and what kind of actions can be taken within those boundaries.

### Start at a tavern

Most GMs don’t present the whole world at once. Most games start in a tavern. So too, the teacher can start somewhere small. Educator Parker Palmer believes that all subjects worthy of teaching (which he calls ‘Great Things’) can be taught from what he calls ‘the microcosm’:

I can present small but critical samples of the data of the field to help students understand how a practitioner in this field generates data, checks and corrects data, thinks about data, uses and applies data, and shares data with others. (...) Each discipline has an inner logic so profound that every critical piece of it contains the information necessary to reconstruct the whole— if it is illuminated by a laser, a highly organized beam of light. That laser is the act of teaching.

He sums it up by quoting William Blake: “see a World in a Grain of Sand.”

There is a reason the tavern (or whatever its genre-equivalent is in non-fantasy TTRPGs) is an attractive starting point for GMs. The tavern contains the critical data of the world: what type of people (or species) live here, what the mood is like and most of all: what is the latest gossip? A grumpy old man will tell you how the place has changed, while the barkeep complains about increased taxes since the new king was installed. From the other end of the bar a catperson will chime in that it is all because the king is spending too much on troops in search of the rumoured treasure in the recently excavated dungeon. All the while there’s a mysterious figure lurking in the shadow of the far end corner, and are they... sharpening a blade? You know. The usual stuff.

In one of my classes, we read a poem each week along with some secondary material. These readings allow us to talk about structure, about style, about imagery, craft and literary devices. One poem is a microcosm of poetry, which is a microcosm of writing, which is a microcosm of art, which is turtles all the way down. And from the same texts, we also talk about human emotions, global politics, photography and great recipes, about attitude, anxiety and overwhelm.

Palmer talks about the impulse among teachers to ‘cover the field’ about which he says it “unconsciously portrays teaching as the act of drawing a tarp over a field of grass until no one can see what is under it and the grass dies and nothing new can grow.”

Don’t kill the grass. Don’t ruin the field for the kids. Show them the world in a grain of sand. Read one poem and talk about everything. Whatever you teach, find your tavern.

Implementing the basic game loop does not necessarily mean replicating the exact turn structure of a TTRPG session. That might even be impossible. It can serve more as a model. It's what I did when I designed (and taught) my class on writing this year.

It started with a session zero in which we discussed the desires of the students and my goals for the semester. We ended up starting with poetry as our main subject. The two sessions after that were spent reading some poems and talking about two very basic ingredients: images and juxtaposition. It was me saying: "This is (part of) the world you're about to explore." After that, students were asked to select a poem for the syllabus. Each week we read one of the poems selected by the students. I would provide a satellite text, something I thought was related to the poem in some way, often, but not always, an essay of some sort. It was a conversation between me and the students through reading material. In class, we would discuss both as a group. We took turns talking about the poem and the other text. I would summarize the discussion on a big roll of paper and when we thought there was nothing left to say we would look at it and I asked them: "What do you want to do now?" We would highlight the parts of the discussion we want to take forward and formulate a writing assignment out of these notes. Then the students would go off and write. After an hour, they returned and we talked about the assignment (first in pairs, then in the plenary group), reflecting on how it was to write, what it taught them about our discussion, what it taught them about their writing. Sometimes we read the work, other times we simply discussed the process.

### Session zero

A Session Zero is a dedicated meeting held before a tabletop role-playing game campaign officially begins, serving as a collaborative "pre-game" to ensure everyone is on the same page. Rather than jumping straight into the action, players and the GM discuss the campaign's tone, setting, and house rules, while also establishing safety tools to define boundaries regarding sensitive content.

It's also the primary space for character creation, allowing players to build a cohesive party with intertwined backstories rather than a group of disconnected strangers. By aligning expectations early, a Session Zero helps prevent future table friction and ensures that the story being told is one that everyone is excited to explore.

It's easy to see how this translates to a teaching context. You might already do a version of this in your class: a first session where you discuss the trajectory, the learning goals and expectations. Simon Kavanagh calls this 'setting the learning arch':

Setting is the most important stage. It requires passion and ambition to push off and set the learning in motion. It should set the stage, culture, tone and mood for the entire learning period, module or semester. A call to adventure. It offers the best start for the study and learning approach and why what we are about to learn is relevant, useful and powerful! It shares the big and small learning agenda and inspires connection and ownership of the program and the shared learning agreement.

In a teaching context, I like doing these both with the group (expectations, theme, way of working, etc) as with the individual students (what do they want to work on? where do they come from? etc).

Throughout the poetry course, we covered a lot of themes. We got to talk about metaphors and similes, documentary poetry, sound poetry, symbolism, layering, Emily Dickinson, coded language, verbs, adjectives, negative capability, verse forms. We also talked about the moon, our inner voice, shame, angels, animals, grief, windows, death, overwhelm, liminality and everything bagels. I could not have designed it that way.

And maybe I should not want to. Ever. There are some basic pieces of advice for running an TTRPG that every GM sooner or later discovers. A really famous one comes from *Dungeon World*, by Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel:

Draw maps, leave blanks.

(...) When you draw a map don't try to make it complete. Leave room for the unknown. As you play you'll get more ideas and the players will give you inspiration to work with. Let the maps expand and change.

This advice was meant to be taken literally. It's about drawing a map. But it has also been read as a metaphor: you shouldn't fill in everything. Leave something to the game unfolding. In that sense, it is closer to another piece of GM advice from the same book:

Dungeon World adventures never presume player actions. A Dungeon World adventure portrays a setting in motion, in someplace significant with creatures big and small pursuing their own goals. As the players come into conflict with that setting and its denizens action is inevitable. You'll honestly portray the repercussions of that action.

This is how you play to find out what happens. You're sharing in the fun of finding out how the characters react to and change the world you're portraying. You're all participants in a great story that's unfolding. So really, don't plan too hard. The rules of the game will fight you. It's fun to see how things unfold, trust us.

The GM, when playing to find out, discovers things along with the other players and can be equally surprised by the story, though coming from another end.

But how do you get there? The answer comes in yet another piece of advice, from Justin Alexander, well known within the TTRPG space for his blog *The Alexandrian*:

Don't prep plots, prep situations. What's the difference? A plot is a sequence of events: A happens, then B happens, then C happens. (In more complicated forms, the sequence of events might fork like a Choose Your Own Adventure book, but the principle remains the same.) A situation, on the other hand, is merely a set of circumstances. The events that happen as a result of that situation will depend on the actions the PCs take.

When GMs overprepare and they are attached to what they prepared, they can end up what is known as 'railroading'. The players feel they have no agency at all and are just going through the motions, rolling dice as a courtesy to the work the GM put in. To me, these pieces of advice have in common that they all are concerned with player agency.

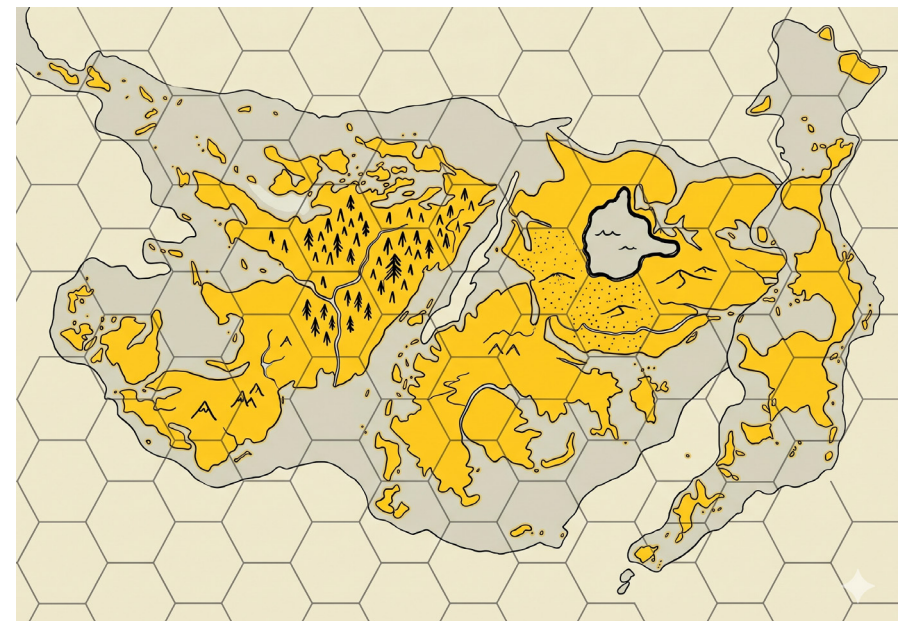
And they can apply to teaching as well. I like starting courses with some sessions that give a general sense of what it is we are exploring. In

poetry classes, I like to talk about language as image and the juxtaposition as a basic building block. In my classes on sound I always start with listening exercises. These are the places of the map I have drawn.

There are some places I know we can go to. For poetry we can go to documentary poetry right on the edge of the map, but we could also end up at the other end of it, with lyrical verse. From listening we could end up in the fringes of noise, but we could also travel to the center of narrative radiodocumentary. These are all the places that are alive and out there. But I don't know if, when and how we will get there.

The blank spaces are in between one subject and the other. If and how we get there, is up to the students' actions. To what they explore in their exercises, or bring to class as material they want to explore. And once we get to one of those places on my map, I'll describe what it looks like and what's going on there (maybe a little about the history of the place) and then I'll ask them what they want to do there.

There's a piece of GM advice in *Apocalypse World* that can help navigate the blank spaces on the map: "Ask provocative questions and build on the answers."



## Maps & battle mats

The tabletop in TTRPGs can be used in many ways. It is often used for rolling dice and taking notes as well as a place for snacks and drinks. Sometimes there will be some representation of the world there too. This can range from a detailed three-dimensional model of the town the players are currently in to a crudely drawn shape of a dungeon room on piece of paper. Maps are used to entice players to explore and ask questions about every detail on them or are merely used to represent positions in combat scenes.

Most games I played in are in between those, but more towards the latter. This way of playing TTRPGs is often called 'theatre of the mind', meaning the visualisation is up to each player's imagination. I like it as a centerpiece though. Any kind of map, whether it be for combat or just as a reference of where in the fictional world we currently are. It helps with the immersion having this physical thing to look at, an anchor. Remember 'Draw maps, leave blanks'? Well here is the beginning of that advice:

Dungeon World exists mostly in the imaginations of the people playing it, maps help everyone stay on the same page. You won't always be drawing them yourself, but any time there's a new location described make sure it gets added to a map.

I try to have something like that in classes too. Often it's just me or one of the students taking notes of the conversation we're having on a large piece of paper. It can be on the table but also somewhere on the wall. In online classes I use an overhead camera and a small whiteboard, sometimes with cut-outs of the artists we're discussing.

Taking live notes is by no means a revolutionary idea, but I like reminding myself that I should use it as a map rather than a record. When I do that, I start drawing more and writing less. Even though I still mostly

write. I draw mostly connectors between words and small symbols, but still: it starts to look less like a list and more like a map. And then I find students (and myself) looking at it while we talk, like players around a map of the world. It reminds us of where we are.

In my poetry classes it has also become the thing we look at when we want to formulate an assignment. Students point to things on

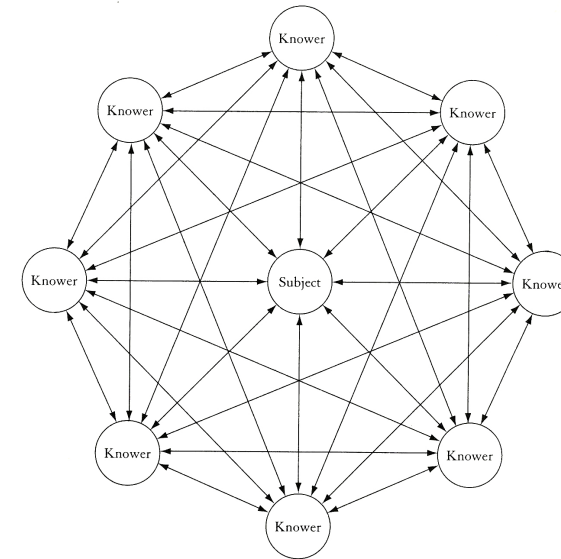
the 'map' they want to include. We underline, circle and connect. It tells us where we want to go.



## Who's playing?

If you model your classroom after a TTRPG session, you end up with a lot of similarities to what Palmer calls a 'subject-centered classroom', as opposed to teacher- or student-centered ones. In this classroom, teacher and students alike, gather around a subject and interact with it and each other:

(...) we must put a third thing, a great thing at the center of the pedagogical circle. When students and teacher are the only active agents, community easily slips into narcissism, where either the teacher reigns supreme or students can do no wrong. (...)



The subject-centered classroom is characterized by the fact that the third thing has a presence so real, so vivid, so vocal, that it can hold the teacher and students alike accountable for what they say and do.

In TTRPGs, this third thing is the story that is unfolding, the world that is taking shape on the table in between the players. In AE it should be the thing you're teaching. TTRPGs can be a model of how that third thing is then explored.

Most TTRPGs and AEs have a very simple principle in common: one participant is introducing the others to a new world. No matter how collaborative the experience around the table is there, there is a difference in roles, a difference in power even. This is especially true in AEs, where that one participant, the teacher, ends up evaluating and grading the

other participants, the students. It doesn't have to be a problem though, according to Palmer:

The real threat to community in the classroom is not power and status differences between teachers and students but the lack of interdependence that those differences encourage. Students are dependent on teachers for grades--but what are teachers dependent on students for? If we cannot answer that question with something as real to us as grades to students, community will not happen.

In a TTRPG the GM is dependent on the players for the story to unfold. Without acting characters, the world they created is just a setting, a rich tapestry in a sealed-off room.

The same can (and should) be true of our classrooms: without the students, the subject does not become alive. Probably every teacher at a certain point in their career has encountered a class where it just won't click. You end up saying something like: "They're not getting it."

The truth is probably more disheartening: they don't care. It's not about our students getting it, it's about getting them to care.

Care is one of the categories that L. Dee Fink introduced to his taxonomy of significant learning that wasn't present in older taxonomies (for example Bloom).

Starting out as a teacher I took care for granted. I thought: these students cho-

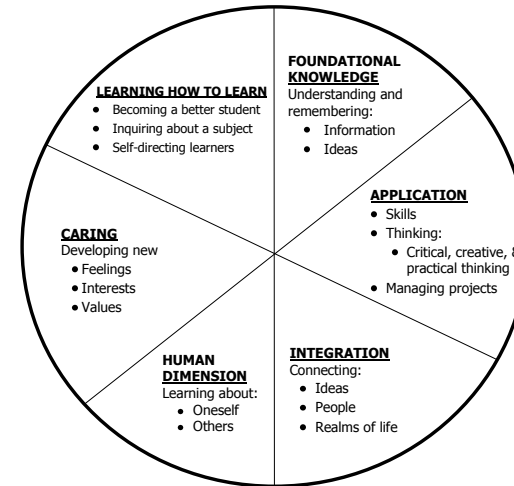
### What is a student?

In most Art Educations, the majority of people participating are responsible for controlling individual characters. Narratively, the students are the protagonists, and students are the primary author of their own story. They choose how they think, look and act. They interact with outside forces like other students and randomization: so a participant in a student role cannot control everything that happens to them. However, they always control how they react.

Participants in the student role can have the following responsibilities:

- Determining their character's appearance, behavior, personality and history
- Making decisions about their actions
- Embodying their voice
- Managing their statistics and abilities
- Addressing educational challenges through action

A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING



se to be here, they want to become artists - of course they care. And then I found it was hard to get them to do something, to really commit to an assignment.

What Dee Fink's taxonomy tells me though, is that care is something we need to learn and thus, to teach. But how? In my earlier days I thought that care leads to agency. And maybe it can. If you're a gifted and inspiring lecturer,

you might be able to do it. Lecturing is just not my preferred way of teaching, also not my strongest suit. But luckily I found out: it can also go the other way. Agency can lead to care. It's what makes great TTRPG sessions great: the players feel that they had agency and were important to creating the story unfolding. That and great dice rolls.

In our classes we can do the same thing. Simply letting them add to the syllabus and coming up with their own assignments is offering them agency. And I found that this agency leads to care. Students were engaged with and responsive to the texts and each other consistently.

And it is what I need from my students to have a successful class. The teacher gets to be a learner as much as a GM gets to become a player. It depends on your play style. If you like to be in control of the story, you'll probably rather prep plot instead of situations, prep a lecture instead of a set of questions. If you're like me you're asking questions, then building on the answers.

## Onwards: tools & techniques

The artist Brian Eno once summed up his process (and career) as follows:

What I really like doing is what I call Import and Export. I like taking ideas from one place and putting them into another place and seeing what happens when you do that. Understanding something that's happening in painting, say, and then seeing how that applies to music.

It's essentially what I have been doing here as well. Looking at what's happening TTRPGs and seeing how I can apply that to teaching. At the beginning of my research I made a list of things I wanted to cover. I haven't covered half of it so far.

For example; in TTRPGs it is common to ask players to summarize the session at the end. This not only takes the load off the GM, it also shows them what the players think is going on in the game: what is important and where they want to go. This can help prepare for the next session. I've been trying this out with students as well and so far it has proven to be a good way to stimulate reflection in the student and take the pulse of the ongoing class.

At the end of a campaign (or even every session) a GM might also ask for player feedback. A system I use a lot is called Roses/Buds/Thorns. The roses are the things the players enjoyed that were working. The thorns are the opposite. The buds (and these are always the most interesting to me) is something they liked but want to explore further, see more of.

This system was one of the first things I took from my ex-

perience in TTRPGs and applied to teaching. I end all my semesters with it and I think it is also a good way to check in during midterms or a similar moment halfway through a course.

The point is: I could go on for a long time about certain techniques from TTRPGs and parallels to AE. And I will, just not here. This is, after all, a starter set. In appendix A and B I will explore two bigger themes that I have developed into products for this box. Appendix N then, offers an overview of sources and inspiration for this starter set, from both pedagogical research and the TTRPG scene. If you want more, you can start at any of those.

Happy exploring!

Participants in the AT role can have the following responsibilities:

- Determining the appearance, behavior and personality of learning material
- Controlling forces in the education unrelated to the students such as environment and time
- Controlling the general flow and focus
- Presenting students with challenges that advance their education
- Preparing materials for classes
- Understanding the rules and deciding when they apply

Some people interpret the AT role as adversarial to the students, as the AT controls all of the challenges that impede or threaten the students. The decision to view the AT as a kind of adversary is ultimately up to the AT and the students, but generally it is unadvisable because it can create social tensions that make it difficult to have fun.

### What is an art teacher?

Many AES have a specialized role that controls any elements of the education that are not the student. The title of this role varies, but here we'll refer to it as the art teacher (AT).

The AT is like a narrator, director, producer, supporting actor and crew rolled into one person. Colloquially, we say the AT 'runs' the class. The AT also is the arbiter of the rules. Sometimes there are no clear rules for what is happening; sometimes there are a few contradictory rules that might apply. The AT is tasked with deciding what to do in those situations.

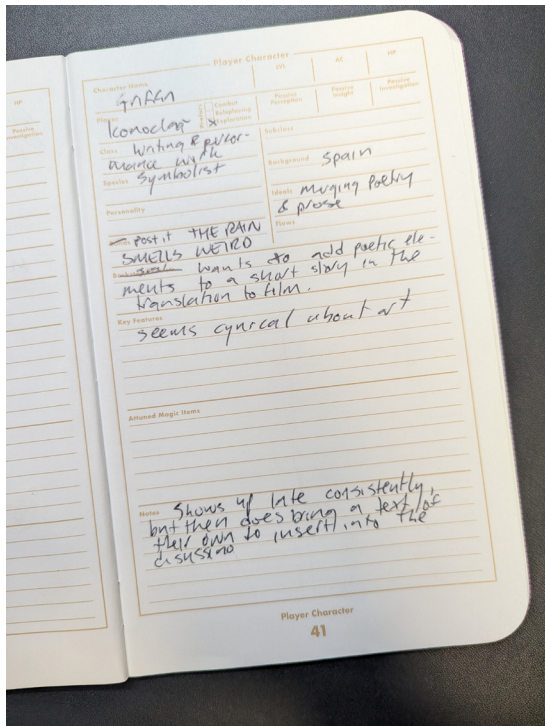
## Appendix A: Student Sheet

When I started this research into TTRPGs and education, I had some loose ideas about what would translate well into a classroom situation. These were all rather conceptual parts of the game. The ones from the first chapter. But I also wanted some hands-on stuff to try out.

Then I found this notebook I had bought but never used. It was made specifically for GMs and consisted of a collection of templates for notes on the world, descriptions of factions and records of encounters as well as some for keeping track of your players and their characters. I thought: what if I try to use that to prepare and record my classes?

I found myself not using most of the templates. I tried to record the artists we discussed in the 'encounters' section, but quickly found that just a list would do. I did, however, find the idea of a template appealing. There was one for keeping track of the players and their characters. There was a box for recording the preference in play for that person (combat, roleplaying, exploration). I liked the idea of recording something similar for students: do they prefer executing assignments, talking mostly

or experimenting with techniques? Maybe I could use an existing model such as Kolb's diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating. I liked to record where they are from in the 'Background' box. Most boxes though, I used for something other than they were intended for. I liked writing down the projects they were working on and the ones they wanted to work on. I jotted down notes on their strengths and the things they needed to work on. In one exercise they got a lot of post-its from the rest of the group describing



their work. They got to keep one and I liked writing down what was on it.

Now, taking notes on my students wasn't new to me, but what the character sheet forced me to do is keep notes on the same things for all of the students. It is an easy way to keep track of the process in an equal, fitting and repeatable way. That goes a long way towards a valid, transparent and reliable assessment.

I thought about the things I would like to record on such a sheet for a student and made multiple designs only to find out that one design would fit the writing course, but lacked things for my course on sound. One would have great features for the first year students (like descriptions of their appearance) which were unnecessary for second years. There was one for the courses I teach live and one for the ones online. I would need a different one for each course, basically. And all of them would probably be very particular to me and of limited use to other teachers.

So I went the other way: I made one that would fit every course by providing constraints, but no labels except for 'Student' and 'Class'. There's a long rectangle that fits about three lines of handwriting that could be used to record a new student's appearance, their previous experience or a description of the project they are working on in class. Then there's two smaller boxes, for recording where someone's from, what medium they are working in or who their peer editor is. Then there's this quadrant division. It could be used to write down strengths, flaws, desires and secrets in classic TTRPG style, but it can also be used to track a student throughout the semester. Then there is a single bar of squares that could be used for attendance, submitted versions of a project or number of studio visits - anything that can be expressed as a cumulative progression. There's some examples on the next few pages.

You get it: you can use the sheet however you see fit. The idea is that it can be fully customized, but give enough of a constraint or suggestion to record the same things for every student in the same group. The back then can be used for anything that doesn't fit a box.

You don't keep track just to be able to assess. You also keep track to remind yourself of what a student prefers, wants to work on and as a record of your work together.



Name: Avery Class: Internship

Strong preference for collaborative work/  
work in a social context

subject  
Collaborative Mapping

partner  
Ruimtelooers

initial meeting

- ideally the project runs for a whole year.
- group size: 5-7 ppl
- wants to consider seasons

midterms

- seems to be a bit behind on schedule; still developing, no iterations yet.
- does feel at home in the project & seems to connect easy to participants
- strong concepts!

Assessment

- ! see if there were more iterations

Follow-ups!

- ~~bring~~ coverty
- ~~introduce to~~ Flour
- internship visit
- docu link Dagboek



Name: Kenna Class: Alternate Design

logline  
Interactive experience set in alternate future, exploring speculative Indigenous society.

peer feedback group  
Weyon, William & Derek

title  
Coyote & Crow

concept

- simple but convincing pitch, well informed
- has a good understanding of potential problems & fitting solutions

research

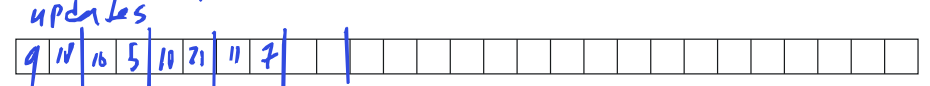
- Afrofuturism in other media
- short but very comprehensive presentation
- understands core tenets & implications for potential audience

execution

- project seemed to big for the time-frame
- has identified this as potential expansion

feedback

- ! playtest early
- ? facilitate solo experience



## Appendix B: Art Teacher's Screen

It is common for a game master to separate himself from the other players by placing a screen on the table. This GM screen is only in part for obscuring notes and hiding dice rolls from players. The more useful part of it is the inside, which functions as a sort of dashboard for the GM. It often contains some core rules to reference quickly. It can also feature some information on players or their characters. A good use, I find, of that space is some help with in-game improvisation: a list of names for when you quickly need one for a random NPC that the players decided they want to know more about or maybe a numbered list of weather types you can roll a die on. It can be anything. There's some that come with a box set, some come with adventures, other ones you can buy separately. You can make your own out of a cardboard box or buy a blank one you can either write on or attach pages too.

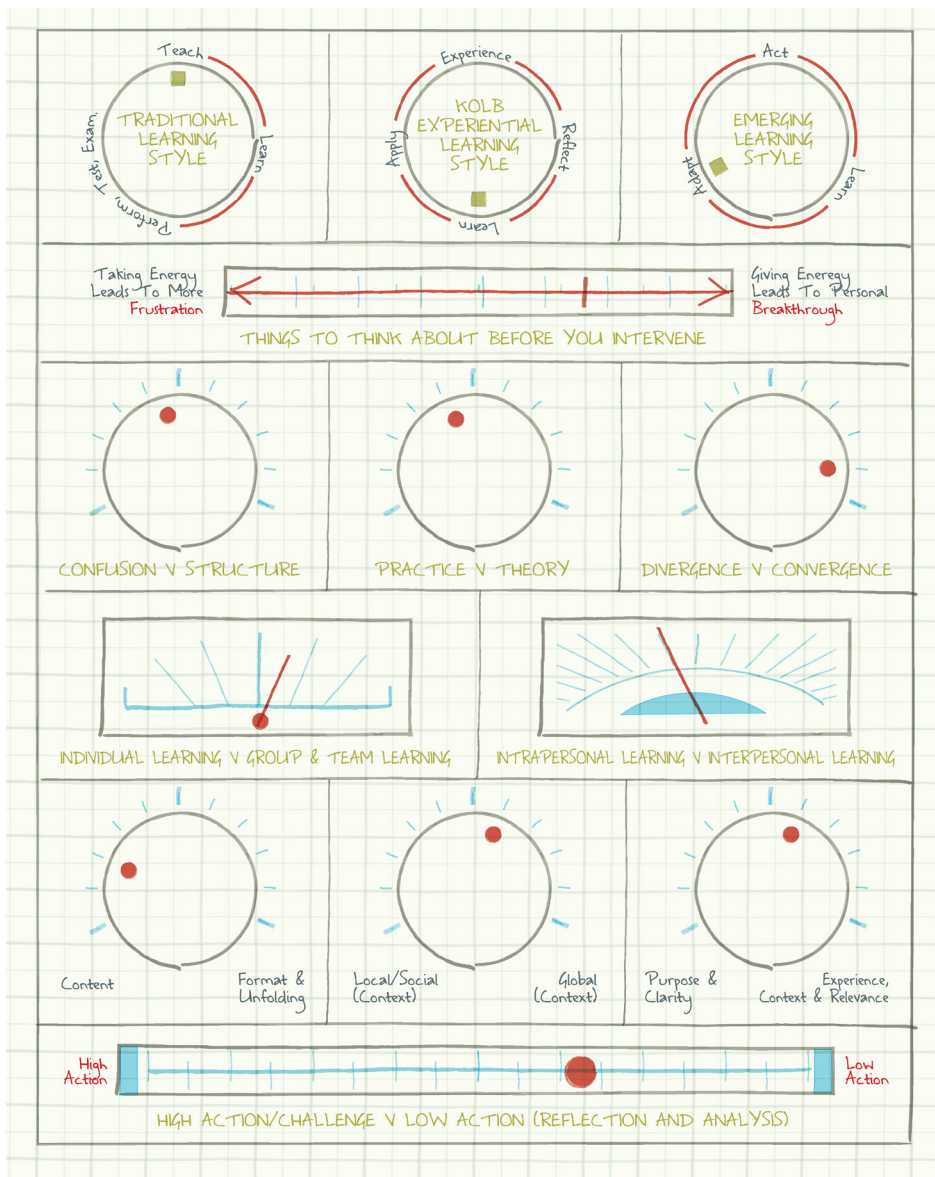
In *Learning Arch Design* Simon Kavanagh presents an 'Experience Control Panel' (see opposite page) which he describes as follows:

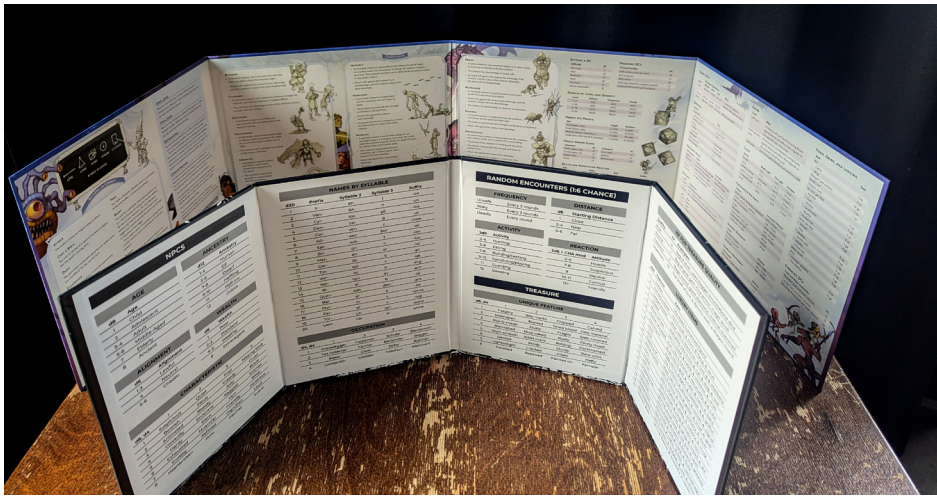
This is an attempt to gamify and highlight the core variables to consider, balance and fine tune in order to create your own learning style and deliver an exciting and transformational learning journey. Or, just build on one of the core learning styles and then tweak the dials to taste! Consider using them as inspiration for setting, holding and landing for students to evaluate and turn the high & low action (volume) up or down.

This control panel reminded me a bit of the GM screen, even though it just exists as a thought experiment. What if we have an actual dashboard for teaching art? As an art teacher, you have to track, remember, create and hold so many things at any given moment, a little help seemed like a good idea. So I designed an AT screen.

I considered making an actual screen, but I didn't like the idea of the obscuring and separating function in a classroom setting. There's precedents of course in the form of the lectern or more contemporary: the laptop, but it doesn't fit my style of teaching very well.

I did however like the second function: part reference, part inspiration. So I ended up making a booklet that resembles the GM screen in





form, but not format: a three panel booklet you might even be able to prop up on the table. But which also lays flat nicely. This box comes with that 'screen', and here's what's on (in<sup>2</sup>) it:

### Blank inserts

Weird place to start, but I like my GM screens customizable. If I am using a pre-made one, I always end up taping stuff over it that I need more than what's on it. So I wanted the AT-screen to be customizable as well. So, in addition to the (re)movability of the pages, there's also some blank inserts. I imagine those would be the bulk of one's personal AT screen.

The notecards you can use for any written list or short piece of text. In the example screen, these are used for writing down learning outcomes, encounters (what artists have we talked about) and a bibliography. If you use it to make lists and then number them, you have your own random table (see below).

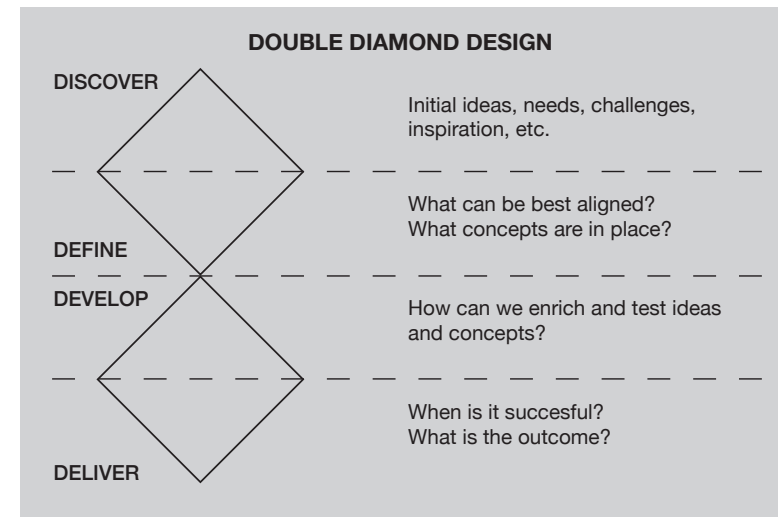
The graph paper can be used for anything visual. I've drawn a class design on one. On the bottom, I've attached a paperclip to keep track of where we are in the semester.

The hexagonal grid paper might be the weirdest for non-gamers. In games it is often used to draw (wilderness) maps. The six sides make it useful for rolling a direction at random. Also: it looks cool. So use it for something that maps well. I like collecting the themes we discuss in class. If one comes up more often, I'll put the word in twice, so the place grows on the map. You'll come up with your own weird stuff.

Lastly, there are some blank transparent sheets. You can use those to write on anything you don't want to save: maybe a class design you want to add notes to or an encounter list you want to be able to cross off but also re-use. Use the marker that came with the box (or any wet-erase marker) and it'll keep quite well for a while.

### Cheat sheets

These are some models, lists, etc. from books on education (and the occasional TTRPG-book). Things you might like to review (like questions to ask during semesters or the taxonomy of significant learning), or simply things you want to remind yourself of. The examples included are the ones I find useful, but do make your own.



### Random tables

These are the majority of the pre-made inserts. Most of them are still cheat sheets, but with an added feature: you can roll on them using the provided dice to get a random outcome. A random table is a numbered list used in TTRPGs to outsource storytelling decisions to the dice. You can use them to determine the weather, the disposition of an NPC or random treasure the player characters stumble upon, amongst other things.

Below is an example of generating a class idea. For this table, you roll a die on each column. Let's say I roll 4, 1, 3. That would get me a class exploring a certain style (for instance in writing). I would use a film (any-

thing between a documentary or feature film and an instagram reel or youtube video). And we would look at contemporary examples.

CLASS GENERATOR			
	TOPIC	MEDIUM	POSITION
1	material	film	canonical
2	technique	text	
3	concept	object	contemporary
4	style	picture	
5	genre / movement	action	niche / avant-garde
6	artist	visit	

Here is one that lets you roll both dice at the same time and gives you one of the working methods described by Elizabeth F. Barkley in her book *Student Engagement Techniques*. Let's say I rolled 5 on the yellow die and a 6 on the black one. I would choose the fifth row and the second column and get 'critical response' as the feedback method. Of course you are also free to choose a category and roll a die within that column.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	KNOWLEDGE	ANALYSIS	SYNTHESIS	APPLICATION	ATTITUDES	LEARNING
1	background knowledge probe	classify	variations	contemporary Issues Journal	autobiographical reflections	in-class portfolio
2	artifacts	frames	letters	hearing the subject	dyadic interview	formative quiz
3	focused reading notes	split-room debate	role play	directed paraphrase	circular response	resource scavenger hunt
4	quotes	analytical teams	poster session	insights-resources-application	ethical dilemma	student-generated rubrics
5	stations	small group tutorials	class book	jigsaw	connected communities	triad listening
6	seminar	book club	webquest	field trip	stand	crib cards

Here is a similar one that lets you determine a method of feedback from a collection of sources (listed in Appendix N). There's the three types of feedback as a reminder, though you could also roll on those.

FEEDBACK			
	METHOD		TYPE
	1-3	4-6	
1	affirmative	criteria-based	feed-up where are we going?
2	perspectives	the circle	
3	open questions	gravity	feed-back what is working?
4	open discussion	summarize	
5	letter	critical response	feed-forward what do we need more of?
6	kopfino	question based	

### Spark tables

Spark tables are also random tables, but they are a bit less concrete. They are meant to spark ideas, not generate fully fledged answers to a question. In TTRPGS they are often used in solo play to generate answers to questions a player might have. I like using them as a GM as well. They are another way to 'surprise yourself' and get out of your own thinking. Here's an example, again on feedback.

PROCESS REFLECTION QUESTIONS				
	ADJECTIVE		NOUN	
	1-3	4-6	1-3	4-6
1	unexpected	influential	failure	alternative
2	challenging	redundant	success	bottleneck
3	technical	transformative	experience	accident
4	personal	intuitive	reaction	dream
5	experimental	abrasive	choice	strength
6	dissappointing	inconsistent	idea	flaw

This table lets you generate a reflection question for a student (or they can use it themselves). On this one, I rolled a 1 and 6 for the adjective, getting me ‘influential’. I rolled a 3 and 1 for the noun, getting me ‘experience’. The question could be ‘What was the most influential experience?’ and that might fit. But you can also interpret it more loosely to get to something like: “What is the most visible part of the process in this work?”

The next four tables collect actions, subjects, methods and aspects (of the work). These can be used individually to spark an idea or combined to generate assignments, research questions, class topics or anything you can think of using them for. Their titles are merely an indicator of what type of words they contain.

ACTION						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	balance	transform	synthesize	omit	critique	guide
2	manipulate	contrast	simplify	exaggerate	unify	symbolize
3	juxtapose	subvert	anchor	evoke	interrogate	allude
4	contextualize	provoke	challenge	distort	disorient	echo
5	soothe	repeat	confront	envelop	alienate	layer
6	saturate	activate	haunt	emphasize	frame	obscure

SUBJECT						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	memory	residue	anecdote	belonging	heritage	belief
2	anatomy	fatigue	posture	intimacy	mortality	sensation
3	chores	shadows	clutter	routine	maintenance	utility
4	cafe	transit	street life	spectacle	market	gathering
5	fashion	media	propaganda	ink	automation	future
6	war	alarm	pavement	disparity	past	erosion

METHOD						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	layer	collaborate	juxtapose	symbolize	confront	balance
2	assemble	intertextualize	linearize	deconstruct	intervene	saturate
3	iterate	metaphorize	allegorize	abstract	participate	stylize
4	distill	hyperrealize	streamline	codify	situate	distort
5	hybridize	anachronize	splice	fragment	minimalize	ornament
6	satirize	appropriate	subvert	simulate	imitate	reduce

ASPECT						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	form	structure	proportion	rhythm	texture	symmetry
2	foundation	boundary	cohesion	essence	paradox	subtext
3	narrative	archetype	metaphor	concept	ambiguity	identity
4	craft	complexity	economy	precision	utility	fluidity
5	nuance	constraint	synthesis	aesthetic	gravity	context
6	tension	urgency	ideology	tradition	subject	void

I can combine an action with a subject to formulate a question. A roll of 5, 3 gives me the action ‘confront’. Combined with a 2 and a 2 on the subject table I get ‘confront fatigue’. That could mean making a piece that speaks to societal disengagement in times of global crisis. I can even add the next two tables in the mix. Rolling 4, 2, 5, 6 I get ‘hyperrealize context’ which in context could mean creating a version of a news medium that is over the top in minute details. It could also mean something else entirely: as said, it all depends on context and gut feeling.

When it comes to spark tables, there is some general advice:

- Trust your gut: whatever comes to mind first is probably a good (enough) idea, maybe even the best one.

- Don't be literal: you can, but you're allowed to interpret it as a metaphor.
- Context is key: it should fit the process or the work or the assignment it is asking about.
- Reroll if it doesn't work: the dice are meant to help, not dictate. If you're stuck on a prompt, roll again. Or invert the roll.
- Tie it into the ongoing class: relate it to the previous assignments or projects the student did.

Working on these tables, I thought of Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's *Oblique Strategies*: a deck of cards containing creative prompts for when you're stuck in a creative process. Basically, the deck is a random feed-up generator, suggesting a next step. I like it a lot so I deconstructed it into a spark table .

This set of tables is (again) a bit different. Let's say you have a student who's writing stories that are a bit thin. You want them to put more into them. You could in that case choose to roll on the 'additive' column for the action. A roll of 1 and 4 would give us 'add' and then we might want them to not overthink it, so for the subject roll you choose the 'direct action' row and get a 5 and a 3 giving us 'specifics'. So the prompt is to add 'specifics'. It could be enough, but you could also contextualize it for the students' story.

OBLIQUE SUBJECT (FEED-FORWARD)				
		1-2	3-4	5-6
		Technical	Physical	Abstract
1-2	Structures	1. Rhythm 2. Harmony 3. Structure 4. Sequence 5. Technique 6. Form	1. Bridge 2. Door 3. Room 4. Garden 5. Water 6. Spine	1. Cliché 2. Concept 3. Specifics 4. System 5. Cascades 6. Ambiguities
3-4	Elements	1. Filter 2. Instrument 3. Feedback 4. Signal 5. Silence 6. Noise	1. Dirt 2. Background 3. Glue 4. Machinery 5. Foreground 6. Body	1. Method 2. Recipe 3. Error 4. Intention 5. Axiom 6. Anchor
5-6	Roles	1. Source 2. Audience 3. Friend 4. Self 5. Master 6. Amateur	1. People 2. Children 3. Ghost 4. Advisor 5. Assistant 6. Stranger	1. Ego 2. Fear 3. Trust 4. Advice 5. Impulse 6. Dignity

Of course you can, and should, make all of these for yourself, containing words that help your classroom and course.

OBLIQUE ACTION (FEED-FORWARD)				
		1-2	3-4	5-6
		Subtractive	Additive	Iterative
1-2	Direct Action	1. Abandon 2. Discard 3. Disconnect 4. Mute 5. Cut 6. Burn	1. Build 2. Amplify 3. Emphasize 4. Add 5. Join 6. Decorate	1. Use 2. Do 3. Discover 4. Repeat 5. Change 6. Slow
3-4	Conceptual	1. Distort 2. Reverse 3. Twist 4. Displace 5. Simplify 6. Abstract	1. Define 2. Assemble 3. Incorporate 4. Speculate 5. Imagine 6. Substitute	1. Look 2. Listen 3. Balance 4. Consult 5. Consider 6. Review
5-6	Psychological	1. Diminish 2. Ignore 3. Relinquish 4. Resign 5. Forget 6. Bypass	1. Accept 2. Trust 3. Believe 4. Honour 5. Support 6. Encourage	1. Think 2. Feel 3. Breathe 4. Wait 5. Sleep 6. Convert

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What I want from games is a curated experience. If I'm going to just go make stuff up with my friends, I can do that. I don't want them to say "figure it out, good luck, here's a 20-sided die." I want to show up and be told "one of the things you can do is stare deeply into someone's eyes" — this specific set of things. To me, that's the purpose of rules in role-playing games as opposed to just co-writing: to show up and be handed this incredible toolbox.

– Sam Dunnewold, *Dice Exploder*

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