

Partnering with New Communities Best Practices

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art Training - Teaching Artists

Sarah group:

- Be adaptable to participant interests and autonomy
- Learn about norms, values, and expectations of organization and students
- Approach with openness, warmth and respect for individuals
- Don't assume inability due to age
- Gather information about the space and participants beforehand, if possible
- Introduce yourself; demonstrate willingness to letting people get to know you
- Show respect through dress, listening
- Be open to possibly critical feedback from students
- Acknowledge mistakes, admit when you don't know something

Rynna group:

- Consistency. Showing up again and again helps to build trust with students
- Trust-building and relationship building. Art is about creating community
- Listen to the needs of students. Be flexible with the curriculum. Teach them what they want to learn
- Assess students' levels and encourage them to move deeper in their own interests. Take skills and use them in their own style
- Help the senior center director, staff and janitor to be on your side. This can help the program run smoothly

Lynda group:

- Get to know the community prior to starting if possible - do a visit to the site, have conversations with the community partner/staff
- Check assumptions about the community as you enter. Consider your own biases as you enter. Who is in the room? What do you believe about those you will be teaching? Be open to being surprised
- Be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs and interests of the participants - you may need to change your plans on a dime
- Connect with the community partners prior to the work to visit or observe. Discuss the work and the community needs, room setup, supplies, etc
- Use humor – allow it to be part of your teaching
- As an artist you are teaching the skills and process of a creative life and unpacking possibilities; we are not psychologists or counselors. Know who to bring issues or problems to in the organization

- As you scaffold learning, build success into each step along the way from the first interaction with the community. Perhaps a drop-in class to interest participants, help with sign up, and get a sense of needs you might not have considered
- Consider a variety of ways to teach the content to reach the needs/learning styles of individuals in your classroom
- Consider the space you are using and how you will be able to address physical needs for your students. Is there room for walkers, what is the sound like in the room, can you move the tables to adapt to students needs, where will supplies be shared and stored, etc.
- If possible, review your lesson plans or curriculum with your community partner contact for their input for ways to bring content to the community
- Reflect after each visit. What went right, what did not work and how might I fix it, what do I need to adjust, what assumption did I have today that was inaccurate? What is the best way for us to move forward in our next class?

Jade group:

- Get to know the staff as well as regulars and their family members if possible
- Ask questions. Try to understand their needs and culture
- Work closely with the staff. Honor their experience and knowledge of the community. They can provide good insights into the community
- Make prior visits
- Make sure you examine the facility, classroom space, and supplies you may need. Be prepared
- Ally with other teaching artists who have experience in the community. They may provide valuable information
- Working well together requires understanding on both parties. Be prepared to ask questions so as to help understanding each others' needs
- Develop a list of questions to bring into your first meeting with the staff and community, Present your plan to the staff
- Gentle follow-ups are sometimes necessary when working with new communities
- Be flexible. Listen to the students as well as the staff's comments
- Observe students' needs and be ready to adjust your class plan accordingly if necessary

Julie group:

- "Enter quietly"
- Solicit feedback off the bat
- After some time, survey students - what's working and not working?
- Encourage everyone to be a part of the decision making; not just you as leader

- Gauge their interest in your artform; make adjustments to the way you teach and modify curriculum so it is more interesting
- Read the room
- Recognize cultural differences; recognize that you come in with your own culture, and cultural expectations
- Learn the power of listening; listen before speaking
- Don't take yourself so seriously
- Not make assumptions about knowledge; don't brush past basics, could leave people behind
- Have three approaches prepped in your back pocket; teach techniques in 3 different ways
- Meet students where they are, not where they "should" be
- Try to take one-on-one time with students to give help to those who need it
- Reach out personally before class to participants to see where they're at regarding artform experience - beginner, intermediate, or professional. Recommend some reading materials to those who aren't prepared
- Have patience. Observe their body language and expression
- Supportive personnel can make or break your session. Be grateful to staff who is supporting the class; get off on a good/kind foot with those folks
- Identify who to reach out for what kind of support. Streamline main contact to 1-2 people.
- Ask staff questions about how they want you to approach, be open to feedback
- Write a thank you note for the janitor!