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Modelling International Collaborations in Art Education by Peter Sramek, Giselle Mira-Diaz, and Charisse Fung

Book response: *Modelling International Collaborations in Art Education* by Peter Sramek, Giselle Mira-Diaz, and Charisse Fung, Bristol, UK, Intellect & Chicago, USA, University of Chicago Press, 2024 (Hardcover), 376 pp., ISBN 9781789389258.

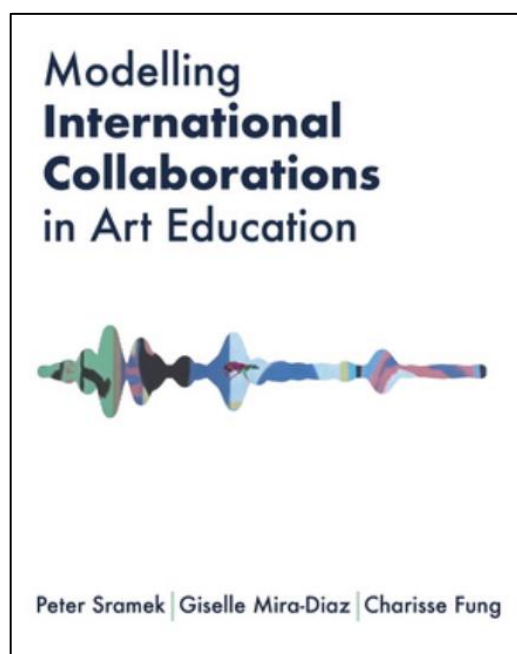
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Figure 1

Book cover



*M*odelling International Collaboration in Art Education appears as a timely — and deeply researched, thoughtfully presented, visually stunning — book just as we, in our “post-COVID” art classrooms, address the disengagement engendered as a result of legislated isolation, long hours of online teaching/learning, burnout, and disillusionment. Given its active premise of “modelling”, co-authors and collaborators Peter Sramek, Giselle Mira-Diaz

and Charisse Fung shape for their readers the collective history of the International Art Collaborations network (INTAC), mapping its innovative, complex, and collaborative pedagogy. In doing so, they purport to inspire reflection on teaching methodologies and student artmaking strategies across cultures and languages. This certainly reflects the confluence of differences now found in many of our local classrooms.

While this book is primarily meant for post-secondary studio settings, it will serve many, resonating not only with those wishing to explore international collaboration, but also those who wish to re-engage the multi-cultural, -lingual, -gendered, etc., individual students in art classrooms. The voices here — authors and other contributors which include fellow educators and students — are impassioned; the energy is palpable and as such it invokes a much-needed reaction.

As an aside, it is of interest to note that *Modelling International Collaboration* is nestled among a larger Intellect series published under *Artwork Scholarship: International Perspectives in Education*, edited by established and prominent Canadian art educators Anita Sinner and Rita L. Irwin. There are other authors in the series, in addition to Sinner and Irwin, such as McGill University researcher Boyd White.

Modelling International Collaborations is authored by an equally appealing group. Peter Sramek (INTAC co-founder) practices in photography and book arts, and was Professor (now emeritus) at OCAD University for over four decades. Since 2010, the development of the International Art Collaborations network has been a key focus for his curricular and research efforts. Giselle Mira-Diaz is an artist and art educator based in Chicago. She participated in INTAC from 2015–17 while at OCAD University and throughout her master's research in Art Education at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is currently the Archive Project Analyst for INTAC. Charisse Fung is a curator, artist, and archivist from Hong Kong (and now Canada). As INTAC alumna, she participated in projects from 2018–2021 at OCAD University, later joining the INTAC Archive Project Team as Project Archivist and Research Assistant.

The make-up of this author/co-researcher group speaks to their acknowledged regard for developing the collective capacity in/for student/faculty classroom activation and exhibition building. There is no question that they take on this task, as art educator David Booth (1998) would have noted, recognizing the inseparable relationship between research as practice and the practice of research —where teachers and students alike reflect from inside the learning (17).

INTAC professors from multiple universities act as teacher researchers/co-currickers (Courtney, 1988), framing schedules, strategies, and practices. This eventually leads to the formation of student project groups which meet and work regularly over the project period. Faculty facilitate these projects (formally in courses or informally as extra-curricular ventures), regularly assisting with artwork development, critique engagement, and exhibition planning. The exciting goal is often group travel to an international site to celebrate and share in exhibition!

This brief summary of INTAC activity does in no way represent the complexity, and nuance of INTAC history and organization, and of the partner groups' project development and exhibitions. This is one of the challenges of the book's presentation. There is a great deal here that one cannot easily digest in a single read (or by cursory examination) and then consider in review. It is almost 400 pages long. The themes are many: modelling global connection and

engaging the global thematic, addressing institutional contexts, providing dynamic student experiences, taking up the challenges of collaboration, bridging differences and working across languages, and activating the online space. What rescues it from being overwhelming is the fact that it is fully and scrumptiously illustrated with examples of collaborative art projects, photographs, screenshots, diagrams, and posters. Former students and other teacher/contributors also share short commentaries, observations, or anecdotes on participation and pedagogy, which punctuate the thematics and provide emphasis and insight. One such clear and focussed short work is Meera Margaret Singh's "Trusting the Process" that delineates the advantages of disruptive pedagogies, of seeing syllabus as a template, of attending to diverse perspectives, and of the need to accept the flow! Chapters end with open-ended queries which, as conversational talking points, act as reflective invitations to educators, students of art education, or students entering collaborations. The book offers itself as pedagogy. And offers it well.

One particularly cogent narrative for me was the authors' tracking of INTAC history and strategic pedagogical refinement over the years, in relation to developing online communication platforms from Skype to Instagram. Throughout, INTAC faculty advocate for and support student-centred and collaborative learning and increased student agency. Key learnings for me as an online art education teacher were around their elucidation of how structure sets the stage in online space. The authors address how we need to find a balance between unpredictability, freedom, and structure, making casual connections possible; how our role is to guide and manage content not so much to edit but rather to realign and focus; and how we need to organize content and access to suit multiple brains. These are all useful strategies which can lessen student hesitation, fear, and confusion.

There is no question that the COVID-19 pandemic was a mass disabling event (Piepzn-Samarasinha, 2022). Often, we now see, especially in post-secondary online classes, a return to the traditional professor speaking to students listening in the classroom. We need classroom and resource support, sustainable dialogic pedagogical models (Zander, 2004), accessible platforms, and dynamic spaces to spark student motivation.

We need to see our students' work in both process and completion, in order for us to effectively understand how to scaffold their learning. The results can be remarkable student projects which exemplify responses to the challenges of communication and creation that come with distanced artistic partnership.

Heidi Persaud, a student, writes of her years with INTAC:

It was the use of conference calling and doing it internationally... That was intriguing to me because it wasn't necessarily used for art making practices at the time [2013-2016]. The idea of access, collaboration, and using something that I consider an accessible technology to create art [and] to be able to communicate with someone I wouldn't have been able to communicate with any other way... I think that was revolutionary. (198)

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