



ENTRE**COMP**EDU

Module 3: Teaching and Training
Go Deeper 3.1 How to develop
skills in spotting opportunities
(observation)



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How to develop skills in spotting opportunities (observation)

Leonardo da Vinci believed that to understand the nature of a problem you needed to restructure it to see it in many different ways. He called this thinking strategy, *saper vedere* or 'knowing how to see.'¹ Unfortunately as humans we tend to see what we want to see.

Da Vinci saw the value of sketching what he observed. The act of sketching can help focus the mind. Ewan McIntosh recommends the use of sketching as a means of encouraging students to see details. He cites the example of a school who wanted to redesign its building and sent students around with sketch pads. The students produced better ideas for the architects than when they simply walked around. For example, they noticed some student lockers were made to look closed but actually they couldn't be bothered and were left open, which the students described as 'flocking'. They also noticed that the lids of open laptops obscured eye contact with students.²



1 Michalko, M. (2001) *Cracking Creativity*, Ten Speed Press, p.19.

2 McIntosh, E. (2015) *How to come up with great ideas and actually make them happen*, NoTosh Publishing, p.88.



The Japanese call this close observation Genchi Genbutsu, which literally means 'get out and see for yourself.' Yuji Yokoya, a Japanese chief engineer who worked for Toyota, was tasked with redesigning the Sienna car for the North American market. Yokoya put into practise Genchi Genbutsu by driving a previous model throughout all 50 American states as well as Canada and Mexico.³ This enabled Yokoya to build up knowledge of how the car would need to adjust to the different terrain. But it was the small designer detail that resulted in the car's success. In Japan people rarely ate food in their cars, whereas in North America the opposite was true. And so Yokoya included 14 cup holders and a flip tray to hold a Big Mac and fries in the 2004 Sienna model which proved a best-seller. Genchi Genbutsu is as much a mental exercise as a physical act. It is about having a mindset which has strong empathy and seeks to look at the viewpoint of others.

Slow Looking

In her book *Slow Looking*, Shari Tishman (2018) put forward a compelling case for slowing down how we look in an age when we scan things in an unreflective manner, taking in whatever surface information is readily available. Slow, deliberate, and careful looking is a capacity that can be taught. For example, you might show students a picture or object and ask them to list everything they see. While it is impossible to see 'everything, everywhere', in an objective sense, good observers try to notice as much detail as they can.

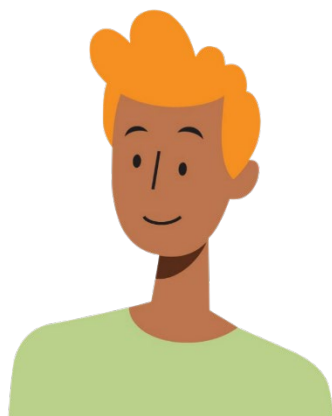
Engaging students in Slow Looking has been likened to putting your classroom in a time out. In the context of Art lessons, for example, it is the process of dissecting a single image or artistic object detail-by-detail with your students. Interestingly, educators who use Slow Looking in art galleries and museums do not share with students much information about the paintings or objects. Students are steered

³ https://www.slideshare.net/emiliano_soldi/bridging-the-gap-how-to-empathize-with-businessand-in-the-meanwhile-create-the-right-products



away from the picture's title to focus on the elements within e.g. colour, setting, scale, medium.

By practising observation skills in a range of curriculum contexts, students are better prepared to spot entrepreneurial opportunities. For their part, entrepreneurs need to process information quickly, but they also need observe accurately. Psychologists talk about the need for both 'fast' and 'slow' minds - the former is characterised by rapid, intuitive, automatic judgements and the latter more deliberate, careful thinking. Learning to observe goes beyond ordinary looking to try and see things that might otherwise be easily missed.



Practical strategies to promote observation skills (spotting opportunities)

- Arrange the students in groups with an appointed scribe. Present a picture or object to students and ask groups to produce up to 10 words describing what they see in 1 minute. Compare the observations of each group. Has anyone missed anything? Repeat the task for another minute.
- Ask students to keep a journal or notebook - many great inventors in the past have done so
- Use [See Think Wonder](#) and other thinking routines
- Use PowerPoint to copy-and-paste different parts of a picture like a jigsaw puzzle. Show one piece at a time and invite comments from students. Gradually build up a discussion - have views changed about the picture? An alternative idea is to cut up a picture and distribute a different piece to a different group. Each group then discusses and describes to the others what they see.
- Jump into a Picture. Invite students to jump into a picture and see it from the inside-out. What do they hear? smell? feel? see?
- Ask students to try out 'people watching' in a safe environment (e.g. playground). In Edgar Allen Poe's short story, The Man of the Crowd, Poe's nameless narrator notices the small idiosyncrasies of everyone walking by as he sits alone at a coffee shop. In one example, he sees that a man's ear slightly sticks out and determines that he must be a clerk of some sort, his ear protruding from years of storing a pen behind it.

