

Theory of Art Education & Best Teaching Practices

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As a lifelong artist and new educator, I firmly believe the arts possess a unique and powerful ability to engage and educate students from all backgrounds and ability levels. I consider the arts to be one of the great unifiers in our world. From the earliest civilizations, it has been the desire of the human spirit to express itself and make sense of the world through art and images. By developing students' abilities to think conceptually, the arts help students create cognitive structures that are transferable to other domains. As students engage in the use of different media and explore their expressive qualities, they develop habits of mind that encourage experimentation, trial and error, and playful discovery. In persevering in their work, students begin to understand that through effort and dedicated attention, they are capable of solving many problems.

Given all that the arts bring to the table of education, as a visual arts teacher, I feel a great sense of responsibility to offer my students the very best of my teaching. To this end, I strive to provide students with well-researched lessons that are emotionally and conceptually engaging. My lessons rely on carefully structured planning. This includes formatting lessons to incorporate lesson openers and daily closure activities. In addition to developing artistic skills through demonstration and hands-on learning, my lessons ask students to address big ideas through multiple avenues such as PowerPoint presentations, group work, individual reflection, written texts, debates and critiques, interactive games, and storytelling, to name a few.

Assessments are a fundamental part of my planning and often act as a starting point as I ask myself, "What do I want my students to learn?" and "How will I know when my students have met these objectives?" These assessments are implemented in formal and informal, formative and summative ways. Critiques, in-progress reviews, self-assessments, in-class one-on-one discussions, final rubric assessments, and daily post it note activities are examples of a few of my favorite methods. Once I have gathered assessment data, I then use it to adjust my lesson plans to be more effective, as well as to accommodate students with special needs, English language learners, etc.

When designing lessons, I believe it's important to draw inspiration from contemporary and as well as historical artists/artworks to allow students to grapple with current issues and timeless ideas. For example, in an elementary lesson I created based on the work of several contemporary light artists, students considered the idea of temporality and permanence as they studied professional light paintings and created their own using new technology in the form of an iPad app designed to capture long exposures. Students were thrilled to "paint" with a flashlight, but also, even as 1st graders, considered the physics of light, how light can be captured through a lens, and that when photographed, observed how it can document movement just as effectively as physical paint.

In addition to well-planned lessons, for me, excellent teaching also includes especially strong classroom management. Without it, so much time is squandered on repeated directions, behavior monitoring, and ineffective discipline. I believe students should be involved in creating mutually agreed upon classroom rules that speak to respect, safety, and clear consequences. This promotes accountability and allows students to gain an understanding of why rules exist. In my classroom, I hope to provide adequate structure to allow for student freedom such as when students are able to find materials they can access themselves and are aware of the circumstances under which they have

permission to get up from their desks. This frees me up to more successfully interact with students needing help and to provide better feedback to students as they work. This also supports my belief in an organized and efficient classroom with clearly labeled materials, work areas, and set up and clean up procedures. When these frameworks are successfully implemented, the classroom runs smoothly, and students can more fully engage with ideas and the process of creating.

Beyond my personal classroom activity, I feel it is very important to work collaboratively with other teachers, both in the arts and in other disciplines. When teachers work together, it results in richer content for students that overlaps conceptually and is built upon from one classroom to the next. I also strive to collaborate with professional artists and art organizations in the community to provide students with real world exposure. I learned just how valuable this could be during my elementary student teaching placement as I worked with the Queens Museum for a student exhibit and acquired free materials through Materials for the Arts, a non-profit benefiting art organizations through donated art materials.

Fundamentally, my greatest belief as an artist and educator rests on one simple concept; art is possible for all students, from all walks of life, and from all social classes and ability levels. Anyone can make art. Including art in the classroom is a necessary and proven method for engaging students in their own learning, and in a world so often filled with yes/no, right/wrong, black/white thinking, I believe art provides a fundamental and desperately needed counterbalance. Art not only teaches, but *celebrates*, the gray in life, and provides students with the tools to manage it. Life is a journey and an evolution that never ends—so too, is the creation of art. As an art educator, I couldn't be more excited and honored to help students along this path of awakening as they discover who and what they can be.