

Art Education for the 21st Century
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Introduction

TEACHING FOR ARTISTIC BEHAVIOR (TAB) is a grassroots organization developed by and for teachers supporting choice-based art education. Student-directed learning in art has been used in classrooms over 40 years as a successful pedagogy in a wide range of settings. Choice-based TAB studio classrooms allow for success on many levels for all learners, while encouraging practice in 21st Century Skills, embedding Universal Design for Learning concepts and meeting guidelines for state visual art standards.

CHOICE-BASED ART EDUCATION regards students as artists and offers them real choices for responding to their own ideas and interests through the making of art. This concept supports multiple modes of learning and teaching for the diverse needs of students. The learning environment provides resources and opportunities to construct knowledge and meaning in the process of making art. Choice-Based Art Education utilizes multiple forms of assessment to support student and teacher growth. (TAB, 2009)

Choice-based art education provides both a philosophy and a practical structure for instruction to be given in the context of work chosen by students. Students take on the role of the artist and are challenged to create images and structures that reflect their lives and interests. The real work of artists is to have an idea and find the best medium to express it, or to use a material that leads to an idea. (Joseph, 2003)

Traditionally students in public school art classrooms are given an art lesson that all must complete. The teacher designs the lesson, gathers the supplies, gives motivational demonstrations and examples, and then coaches students to be able to make the preconceived end product. Any students who face physical or mental challenges are given an adapted version of the project and they do the best that they can. This type of instruction exercises and trains for direction following to produce a specific product. These skills were highly valued in the Industrial Revolution but do not address the needs of a 21st century work force. In addition, the whole-group approach does not connect with increasingly diverse student bodies.

It is important to investigate working classrooms to observe how choice-based teachers meet diverse needs while offering students the opportunity to do the real

she meets with four one-hour classes per day for twelve weeks. This paper examines one of her groups. There are 37 students in the class. They come to art with two adult paraprofessionals who normally work one on one with a particular student. Ellyn is the art teacher. Nine students in this class are on extensive Individual Education Plans. Among these is one student with autism, one student with Down syndrome, one student with aspergers, two English language learners, with the other four students facing very difficult personal challenges. The remaining 21 students have various other issues that they are dealing with on a daily basis, not to mention the difficulty of just finding a seat in such a large class! Despite all of the above, these students function very well in the classroom. They are able to work independently and are meeting the curriculum criteria.

At the beginning of each class Ellyn presents information and updates, after which she leaves students explore the new material or choose independent work. Students get right up and find their unfinished work from previous class time, or gather materials and resources for new projects. They work in groups or alone.

their process was useful in so many ways for both of these boys. Because Chris, who is learning English, was highly motivated to communicate his ideas, his art projects helped immensely with his language acquisition skills. His partner Brendan struggled in his other classes.

CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

In the 21st century working world it is important to be able to work in groups, hear other ideas, consider other options and discover strengths and weaknesses of

complete a sculpture of a city. Brian has control over the way he spends his time and his work reflects his interests and abilities.

SOCIAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

Children who rarely interact with each other outside the studio will sometimes join forces for a particular project. When students work with a new group of partners, they expand their scope and gain new perspectives and new skills.

PRODUCTIVITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

done alone and as a group. Students ask questions, give comments and defend their decisions. When students take the germ of an idea, bring it to reality and then present their work to the group, they gain confidence in themselves and also learn to be open to the ideas of others.

LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

Brendan had been a sit-in-the-back-of-the-room kind of kid who had struggled academically most of his life. One of his art ideas brought him from the back to the front of the room as a leader and expert who other students sought out. Brendan came to art one day and told Ellyn that he had heard a moose call while visiting Maine; he wanted to make a something that could imitate that sound. He gathered a can and a string and then recruited Tyler and Brian to help him drill a hole in the can and tie in the string. Pulling on the string produced a faint noise and through experimentation Brendan decided to get the string wet. This was the trick! The moose sound bellowed from the can and soon everyone wanted a moose call! Brendan taught the class and then went on to experiment with different containers and different strings to get a variety of noises. Ellyn was not involved with this project Brendan owned it all. After that day Brendan was included in a lot of projects and had no problem moving about the art room and coming up with ideas. The day that Ellyn had to remind him to settle down made her secretly smile. Brendan had changed his status in the classroom and his view of himself in the group.

RESEARCH AND INQUIRY

Students often use the computer for research if they cannot find answers in the books and other resources in the room. One student pulled up images of guitars so that he could make an accurate drawing in preparation for a construction.

ASSESSMENT

in digital portfolios as well as references for self-assessment.

TECHNOLOGY LITERACY

The workforce of the future will need fluency in using technology. Students have many opportunities to use the computer for research as well as a tool for art expression. One group found a graffiti program that helped them generate a font they needed for their project.

With the variety of approaches for students to take, the opportunity for 21st-century skill building is embedded in every art class.

Teaching for Artistic Behavior classrooms support differentiated student learning

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In student-directed learning, children become problem finders. A TAB classroom job to help students translate those questions into insight and understanding. (Speicher, 2009)

TAB classrooms also engage students in material that has relevance to them. Because students all start at different places and learn at different rates, it is necessary to differentiate without compromising the quality of our learning environments. Teaching for Artistic Behavior pedagogy allows for this. In this studio setting, supported by the teacher, students frequently accommodate themselves!

TAB helps to build a learning community where students of all abilities feel honored and vital to what is happening in their world. And where all voices, ideas and sameness!

Teaching for Artistic Behavior supports Universal Design for Learning

ssroom seems naturally to run smoothly, there is a subtle and complex structure underlying her success with students. TAB classrooms are each unique, reflecting the students, the individual teacher and the school setting. However, all TAB teachers, in order to meet the artistic and learning needs of their diverse students use principles very much like those of Universal Design 2>BDC BTiverse

techniques, they can start where they are strong and gain confidence to work outside their comfort zone. Students can work with their peers and often learn from them. Cooperative groups form and re form organically and students have ample opportunities to engage in positive social interactions. Some students follow a line of thought over time and develop a working style. Students show what they know when they work independently. Children take on responsible roles, setting up and caring for materials. (Douglas, 2004)

Teachers in a choice-based classroom are able to work with small groups of students while others work independently. There is time to make careful observations, noting strengths and weaknesses in individual students. One on one interventions are possible for struggling students and the teacher can get to know students better. High expectations are part of the pedagogy, and teachers can expect students to come to class highly motivated and ready to work.

Teachers create the structure of the room and carefully manage the time, the space

to problems in original and innovative ways. The predictability of choice-based studio centers allows children to pursue and refine their ideas over weeks, months and even years if they are inclined to do so. This is their work.

COMMUNICATION / COLLABORATION: Students learn to communicate their ideas and needs clearly because they are motivated to succeed at their self-directed work. Groups of self-selected learners form their own collaborative teams

challenges.

TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH AND INQUIRY: Students use technology to research ideas, find visual references and expand concepts. Teachers use technology to present information of relevance to the class.

ASSESSMENT: Learners document and comment on their progress in electronic portfolios. Teachers maintain assessments of student learning in formats that are compatible with their district expectations.

ART MAKING: Digital photography, animation, movies and graphics programs enable students to explore the immediacy of digital art. The ability to create and revise without loss to the original work is an incentive for those who fear taking risks with their work.

LIFE & CAREER SKILLS

FLEXIBILITY / ADAPTABILITY: Every class brings unexpected discoveries. Students interact with available resources in studio centers; teachers respond to incoming student ideas and artistic processes.

INITIATIVE / SELF-DIRECTION: Learners are intrinsically motivated to engage in meaningful work from personal context. After a brief demo lesson, students begin their work without teacher assistance, setting up materials, pacing themselves and putting materials away at the end of class.

SOCIAL/CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS: Students work with friends and classmates at will, sometimes collaborating, sometimes working side-by-side. Negotiations arise over shared materials and space. Peer coaching and discussions about ongoing work are prevalent in the studio centers. Students learn to recognize their own working style and preferences, and to appreciate the same of others. Personal work brings diverse perspectives in to the classroom.

PRODUCTIVITY/ACCOUNTABILITY: Students are expected to come to class with ideas or a willingness to explore materials and techniques. Learners show what they know and can do when they work independently and are held accountable for their progress. The teacher intervenes and modifies content as needed.

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