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Teaching For Artistic Behavior

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Category:

Differentiated Instruction

Subject(s) of entry:

Art

Pedagogy:

Blended Learning

Grade(s) to which this was taught:

1, Elementary school

Grade(s) for which this will be useful:

1, Elementary school

Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) is a style of choice-based art education that focuses on the students, their interests, and their ideas. Students are viewed as authentic artists, and groups of materials are made available. Play and experimentation are essential to creative development and confidence in risk-taking.

Entry Narrative

The summer after my second daughter was born, I decided to work with a professional coach to see what I should do next in my life. During one of our first meetings, she shared her belief that who we are in high school is who we are at our core.

When I was in high school, I was very involved in Jewish youth group, but I also loved creating. All my friends were artists, I took art classes and I stayed up late, locked in my room, just *making*.

However, I never considered myself an "artist". I didn't have the same drawing and painting skills as my peers, so I shrugged it off as a hobby or a phase, something that would pass. However, it's something I'm drawn to do, and something I need to live. This professional coach opened my eyes to a problem that I now see in so many of my students– just because one isn't good at one type of art, does not mean they are not an artist or that they can't use art as a form of expression. Not all artists can draw or paint well. It was then I decided to pursue a new career in art education.

Although I am a seasoned Jewish educator, teaching art posed some new challenges for me.

The first was that the standard format for art education is often to introduce an artist, his/her style and for the teacher to develop, present and guide a project that reflects this learning. All students would be required to complete the same or similar products that would then be put on display in the halls of the school. My first year

teaching art, I followed this formula. Students produced beautiful art, parents ooh-ed and ahhh-ed at the miraculous nature of their child's talent.

However, in my previous experiences teaching in other settings, student voice, constructivist learning and choice were essential to creating dedicated and passionate learners. I was struggling to find a way to do this in the art room. I often would take a "free" day between teacher directed projects, put out unused art materials and tell students they could make whatever they wanted. Students artwork was so immensely creative, they were so well behaved, they created amazing art and they were more proud of these creations than anything I was instructing them to create.

I then had the privilege to attend the conference for the National Association of Art Educators and attended a workshop on Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB). I finally found art teachers that were driven more by the development of creativity for each child than by the collective impression of finished projects. I found other art educators who believed our work was to help students learn creativity and skills they can use in every area of their lives.

As I began to read more about the TAB classroom, I recognized so many of the challenges described by other art educators:

- Students completing teacher directed projects do not have as many opportunities to really show who they are as an artist, what their voice is, what skills they have and where they can show growth.

- They struggle to apply learned skills from the teacher-directed projects to other works. When given the same project/task to complete, students were seeing how they compared to their peers.
- When students couldn't complete the task, their self-esteem plummeted and often their behavior in class declined. These students are the ones who claimed to dislike art, to waste art materials and to disrupt the classroom dynamic.
- Students were saying "I'm not a good artist" constantly in my classroom. It was so disheartening and deeply personal.

After researching a bit more about TAB and talking with our school administration, we agreed that a change would align the art curriculum with the rest of the school's philosophy.

"Faculty members embrace each child and guide them to stretch and grow as learners and unique individuals. We engage students' curiosity and make learning meaningful, experiential, and enduring across all grades. In our classrooms, Science Labs, and Design Lab, students ask questions, research, brainstorm ideas, prototype solutions, take ownership of their work, and address real-life issues."

The art curriculum needed to reflect this.

In my second year at Milton, I began to introduce Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB). We began each lesson with some art vocabulary and a mini

lesson about an artist or a skill set. Students then had a choice, they could complete the project I introduced, or work on their own projects (for which they were expected to complete a planning sheet). Since so much of TAB is about exploration of materials and one's own creativity, not all artwork is meant for exhibition. Some is about play. Each student was expected to complete at least *two* original pieces of artwork during the year that were exhibition worthy. These pieces had to take two or more classes to complete, had to be an original idea, completed without a partner, and students had to write an artist statement about their work. These projects were amazing. The aesthetic was definitely more of a child than an adult. Students were *proud* of their work, they were focused, they were brave and explored, they found and solved problems. Most importantly, they were finding their passion in the art space. They could build sculptures, they could paint, they could weave. They had choice. I guided each and every student to explore new materials relevant to *their* work, to study famous artists who tried similar methods, and to consider how they could make more than one draft of something if they weren't pleased with the first version. Students were driving their own art education and it was stunning!

Examples of student artwork in 2017-18:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=19KU5_RKq54h_B3PetdMstXkKQ8-hH2p1wPvtMijuff8