Art Education for the 21\textsuperscript{st} 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 21\textsuperscript{st} 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 21\textsuperscript{st} 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 work of artists. In Ellyn Gaspardi’s art room at the Williams Intermediate School 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. Some engage in conversation about their art; others work quietly in their own space. Ellyn is free to circulate and to work with small groups. One group of boys works on a group skateboard project; others have finished their version of a hockey board game and they are testing it out. The variety of projects and working styles reflects the diverse interests and abilities of this group.

Teaching for Artistic Behavior supports 21 Century Skills

A group of girls came to the art classroom with a drawn out plan for a sculpture that they wanted to make in art class. This type of inventing and testing of hypotheses happens on a daily basis in a TAB classroom. Some of these plans succeed, coming out just the way students envisioned. Others are a success because of mistakes and failures that motivate the students to correct and work through them. These girls made a marble run that looked great on paper but needed lots of adjustment when they tried it in three-dimensional form. It was an opportunity for them to create and then recreate until they were satisfied.

21st century thinking skills fall in to three categories: learning and innovation skills, life and career skills and technology skills. (21st Century Skills, 2009)

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Chris and Brendan worked long and hard on models of swimming pools. They were particularly interested in using real water and seeing if they could get it to move from source to pool. This problem solving activity and the way the artists explained
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 found the art class to be a place where he continued to feel “smart” even as he 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 colleagues. Ellyn and her students continually discuss strategies for navigating the world of collaboration and communication. Because students choose their own groups, they are free to work with those who share their interests and sometimes discover that their friends aren’t the best partners for the job. Derek, a student with autism and Mitchell, a student with various developmental delays, were recruited to work with a group of students they don’t normally engage with outside of class. Because of their previously demonstrated strengths in painting and building, they were asked to join in this project, which in turn opened the doorway to new friendships.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Students really hone this skill in a TAB studio classroom! This is more important than ever, as many schools are focused on test preparation: divergent thinking has to take a back seat. Without practice students find it harder and harder to look into the many information files within their brains to put together unique solutions. They become less self reliant and less sure of their own powers to solve a problem. Jenson was knitting on a large spool. His friend Ritchie wanted to do this also, but there were no more knitting spools in the art room. When Ellyn checked in with him later, she discovered that he had made his own spool out of an egg carton! Genius!

INITIATIVE AND SELF-DIRECTION

Brian is a student with Down syndrome. Most of his day he is shadowed by a paraprofessional, but in the TAB art room she usually steps aside. Brian is very adept at getting his own materials and choosing what he would like to do in art each day. In fact, Brian also knows that art can make him feel better. Sometimes if he is having a difficult day he will come into art and just paint and hum. He is not focused on product on those days-- he just enjoys the meditative action of painting. When he is humming his teachers know he is happy. Over time Brian has initiated a variety of projects--drawing with rulers and templates, painting and then cutting up and collaging what he has made. He has recruited other students to help him
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

All of Ellyn’s students spend time talking about and analyzing their work. This is 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 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

Ellyn’s students use the digital camera to record their work. They use these photos in digital portfolios as well as references for self-assessment.

TECHNOLOGY LITERACY

The workforce of the future will need fluency in using technology is a tool. Ellyn’s 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 21 century skill building is embedded in every art class.

Teaching for Artistic Behavior classrooms support differentiated student learning

Derek’s story is not unusual; stories like his are repeated in TAB classrooms year after year. Derek is a student with autism. Derek is uncomfortable in crowds, he has difficulty retrieving words to communicate verbally with others, he exhibits self-stemming behaviors and occasionally when life is overwhelming Derek has a melt down. When Derek first started Ellyn’s room he would only draw the Pokemon characters that had been his obsession. With gentle encouragement Derek branched out into making collages of these characters. After some time in the art room Derek caught on to the choice atmosphere and began to relax. He stopped self-stemming behaviors and started to come to the art room excited and full of ideas. He especially loved recycled sculpture and the hot glue gun. He began to demonstrate flexibility in his thinking as he searched through the materials and considered the possibilities. Derek’s ideas were so playful and unique that other students took notice. Derek began to interact with the other students and they began to invite him to collaborate on projects. At the end of the trimester Derek not only participated in a group project, but he volunteered to be the spokesperson for the group! At the request of his teachers and parents Derek will remain in the choice art room for the rest of the year due to all the growth that occurred for him in this atmosphere.

Joan Bianchini, Derek’s teacher in the Life skills/Connections classroom says: “In the choice art room my students are able to work off of their strengths. All of the students see each other’s ideas and my students have gone from saying ‘I can’t’ to ‘I can’. The regular education students don’t see my students as the ‘different kids’ anymore. They say ‘hi’ to them in the hallway. They say ‘Nice boat you made in art today, Derek.’ It’s their time to shine.” (Bianchini, 2010)
In student-directed learning, children become problem finders. A TAB classroom creates the environment encourages student questions. It becomes the teacher’s 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 problems are heard equally, but answered differently…equality does not mean sameness!

Teaching for Artistic Behavior supports Universal Design for Learning

Although Ellyn’s classroom 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 for Learning (UDL) Teachers present information in multiple ways, encourage students to show what they know in diverse ways, and most important, connect with and celebrate student interests, leading to intrinsic motivation. The National Center for Universal Design for Learning’s extensive website offers in-depth guidelines for reaching diverse learners. Choice-based teachers consider guidelines such as theirs to exemplify good teaching for any student! We believe that “Students differ in the ways they perceive and comprehend the information presented to them.” “…no one type of representation will be optimal for all students, so providing options in representation is essential.” “Students differ markedly in the ways they can be engaged or motivated to learn.” “In reality, no one means of representation will be optimal for all students, thus, providing multiple options for engagement is essential.” (UDL Guidelines, 2009)

Components of a Teaching for Artistic Behavior classroom

Because of the way the choice studio is structured, students can work at their own speed. Some children make more than one piece in a class, while others may work for several sessions on one piece. When students can choose their materials and
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 and the materials available in the studio. Teachers also bring the spirit necessary for the community of artists—an enthusiasm for risk taking, experimentation, ambiguity and a delight with making things.

The studio is arranged in centers, usually organized by medium. Classes begin with the brief demonstration of a material, technique, or concept for the whole group. Students may try the new focus or choose to work independently in centers. Each studio center contains resources to enable independent work. Centers contain “menus” which are lists of materials or directions. Some menus list set up and clean up procedures. Others give information about techniques. Centers contain examples of student and adult work, books, prints, photos and Internet pages. Tools and materials are organized for easy student access and clean up. Materials in these centers have been introduced in previous whole group demonstrations.

Information is transmitted in many ways (Hathaway, 2008, Gaw, 2008) and there are many teachers in the studio classroom: students learn from the adult teacher, from directions in the centers, from other resources in the studio, and from other students. Students also teach themselves! When students work independently the teacher can observe what they know and can do.

Conclusion

In order to think creatively and divergently students must have time and space to practice. Scanning the files in our brains to come up with new and unique answers not only becomes harder as we get older but, this ability can also be hampered by an atmosphere that cultivates fear and judgment. It is in this fear and judgment that conformist thinking takes root. Classrooms that rate students on efficiency,
memorization and test scores create an atmosphere with only a few options for exhibiting personal strengths. If students don’t find success in one of these areas they become disengaged from their learning and are sometimes just “not there” literally and figuratively.

In the TAB classroom children are taught to embrace mistakes as a way to find an answer. Students are taught to welcome diverse solutions to a problem and practice a fluidity of thinking that lays the foundation for innovative thought. Students come to class ready and willing to learn because they feel safe, valued and capable. (Douglas, Hathaway & Jaquith, 2007) They feel ready to push the limitations of the materials and thought processes that they have been exposed to and this is when and where the sparks of innovation ignite. As teachers it is our responsibility to fan this spark through our teaching practice and our daily interactions with our students.

We are not suggesting that current models of teaching be scrapped. However, a choice-based TAB art room in a school creates a place for students to stretch beyond mere information retention. The habits of mind (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2007) that students acquire in the choice-based setting will give them what they need for the future. Eliminating traditional art room pedagogy geared towards art talented students, decorating hallways and teacher-directed lessons allows art materials, art language and artistic behaviors to be exploited for the power house that they can be in the field of innovation. The self-directed classroom becomes a veritable “think-tank” where all students’ skills and knowledge have a place to synthesize and into workable real life solutions and new ideas.

Appendix
Teaching for Artistic Behavior
Supports 21\textsuperscript{st}Century Skills

The Partnership for 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Skills highlights the following cognitive skills for learning that meet the needs of today’s world. Choice-based teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to develop and expand these skills during art class.

http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/

**LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS**

**CRITICAL THINKING / PROBLEM SOLVING:** Learners find and solve problems through inquiry, divergent thinking, play, reflection and evaluation. Students who bring ideas to class plan ahead for their work; others discover ideas by experimenting with media at studio centers.

**CREATIVITY / INNOVATION:** Students who are intrinsically motivated will respond
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 allows learners to “go deep” with 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 based on common interests and goals. Peer coaches assist with classmates’ 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.
LEADERSHIP/RESPONSIBILITY: Teachers organize the learning environment and students are expected to maintain it, by keeping studio centers tidy and organized. Learners take responsibility for their own learning and behavior. Opportunities for student leadership in the choice-based classroom are plentiful; those who show readiness are encouraged to peer coach, curate exhibits, design new studio centers and help maintain electronic portfolios.

http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org/21stcenturyskills.html

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Bibliography


