

“Art must occupy a significant place in the educational system if that system is truly dedicated to exploring and developing the human intellect.”

-Phillip Dunn, Art Educator

In order for individuals to function in society, schools must help students develop critical thinking and social skills in order to acquire knowledge vital to future experience.

Regardless of ability level, all students can learn basic art skills according to their individual developmental level. Too often in art, educators focus on the concept behind a work of art, but pay no heed to the skills required to achieve successful implementation of said concept. I believe in teaching two fundamental skills to young learners: seeing and drawing. These perceptual skills enrich each other to produce a perceptive and creative individual. Can you imagine a math classroom without the basic skills of addition and subtraction? Art instruction must be firmly grounded on knowing the difference between what it is to see and what there is to see.

Students exist in a world of visual culture: immersed in a sea of image, self-statement, reflexivity, and cultural pluralism. Children seek meaning and pleasure from visual images more than any other time in history and expect their culture to be enhanced through television, video, and the internet. But the term visual should suggest more than that which one sees with the eye. Images and other visual artifacts often engage the viewer in modes of sensing other than sight. That is to say, art is about much more than just seeing. It is about experiencing the work in such a way that the entire self is lost in the object physically, emotionally, and cognitively.

Art education in the public school system is an integral component of the K-12 curriculum providing the student with multiple opportunities for collaboration, observation, global awareness strategies, problem recognition and solving, and creative and critical thinking. Immersing the student in their visual culture promotes sensory perception and the ability to communicate visually. Art sensitizes students to the physical and emotional environments around them, promoting a deeper awareness of their shared culture.

My art classroom is student centered, where lessons are crafted based on student culture. The foundation of my instruction centers on the constructivist philosophy, encouraging students to interact socially and collaboratively to create knowledge and meaning. I believe that children learn best from experience, active involvement and manipulation of media. This provides an atmosphere of freedom and expression within the classroom. Learning in my class takes the form of hands on experience which promotes an active role in student learning. Such hands on experiences provide young learners the opportunity to encounter authentic tasks steeped in understanding, analyzing, questioning, synthesizing and evaluating. Because my classroom regards the student as the artist, learning must take place in an environment of mutual respect, comfort, and understanding. This requires an atmosphere where students feel that mistakes are acceptable and are a normal part of the learning process. A child who feels comfortable and accepted in a classroom is a child whose behavior will not be a problem. All children will one day become a part of society and they must know how to live within it. My art classroom, while promoting individual choice, reflects the structure of the world outside the school walls. Students must learn to work collaboratively, alone, or with people they do not know. They must understand that many people share resources and all must do their part to maintain order and upkeep in the classroom.

Academic and Social Expectations

I maintain high academic expectations for students in art class centered on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Students come to me with a range of diverse needs, ability levels, and exposure to the arts. I address student needs by tailoring my curriculum to each child's specific ability level and work to ensure that all students receive maximum exposure to the visual arts. My curriculum is flexible, but demanding. To that end, students in my art class should exhibit critical, creative thinking skills, able to solve problems using their knowledge and intuitive interpretations. I believe that students should be able to work collaboratively with others while preserving their own individuality. An artist's work is informed by the world around him/her. The visual arts naturally integrate knowledge across the educational strata, connecting science, math, social studies, language and technology. As such, students should recognize the

interrelatedness of all knowledge, seeking out the connections among a variety of fields of study and building on past learning to actively construct their educational experience. The visual arts student should apply that knowledge in a meaningful way using art materials that best express their concepts.

Our society is governed by certain social expectations. My art classroom is a social environment where students talk, collaborate, work individually and ask each other for help and ideas. Students in my class are expected to exhibit socially competent behavior appropriate to their specific developmental level. I expect all students to demonstrate honesty, dependability, and self control. Students should be polite and respectful to all members of the school community.

Behavior Management

Managing student behavior is essential to creating a classroom environment that creates positive relationships and promotes learning in a healthy atmosphere. I believe that punishment and consequences are two distinct methods of behavior correction. Consequences are the logical result of an undesired behavior; however, punishment is not a logical result of undesired behavior but an additional action undertaken to improve a student's behavior. I believe that reinforcement should be used sparingly in order to evoke particular responses or behaviors from a student or class. Undesired behaviors can be prevented by addressing problems at their source, but there is no easy fix-all solution. I believe that problems with students must be dealt with individually and privately to maintain the dignity of the student and the respect of their peers. I prevent many problems by working with the student to solve a challenging behavior. I offer students choices, ask open ended questions, and alter the situations which provoke problem behaviors. In order to prevent problems from escalating, I respond appropriately and proportionately to the issue at hand to avoid further classroom issues. When a student's behavior cannot be managed in the least intrusive method possible, I will work with the student to create a behavior plan to help him/her learn the appropriate skills and behaviors required for success in my classroom.

“Art provides unique opportunities to explore and develop ways of knowing, doing, and being. As such, art, as a core subject...is a critical component in the development of every child and in multiple ways permeates every aspect of human existence. –U.S.

Department of Education