

**Art Curriculum & Big Ideas**

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### Summary

#### Curriculum & Standards

One of the major changes within contemporary or “21<sup>st</sup> century” arts-based curriculum, is the change in focus from smaller ideas, and technical concepts to a curriculum that focuses on big ideas. This focus is reflected daily across art rooms, throughout literature, within academia, and supported by the N.C.A.S. of 2014. The (2014) National Core Arts Standards are designed to guide the delivery of arts education in the classroom with new ways of thinking, learning, and creating (National Visual Arts Standards Custom Handbook). I believe a good starting point to understand the present, is to understand the immediate past.

This first step to update and modernize the standards was to update the overall ideas, concepts, and understanding(s) one should focus on. Stewart (2014) writes, “Enduring Understandings represent ideas and processes we want student to integrate, refine, and keep as they move through the art program and eventually into adulthood.” Fifteen key ideas or “enduring understandings” allow students to sharpen their perspectives and guide the focus of the lesson plan and artmaking. (p. 6-7). Rather than focusing on antiquated historical narratives, or mimicry of technical drawings, the focus shifts to key concepts that allow students to think, participate, and be as an Artist.

The second step is the re-frame the idea of what an art teacher can be. *The Art Teacher* is often thought of in terms of fine art, or perhaps arts & crafts **projects**. A key component to teaching art is designing. Wiggins (2013) writes, Teachers are designers. An essential act of our profession is the crafting of curriculum and learning experience to meet specified purposes. We are also designers of assessments to diagnose students’ needs to guide our teaching and to enable

us, our students, and others (parents and administrators) to determine whether we have achieved our goals (p.13). Changing standards should not hinder one's ability to adapt and learn new modalities of; teaching and making art.

### **Creating**

The first category of standards is Creating. The six Enduring Understandings of Creating draw upon multiple ways in which artists and designers engage in artistic investigation (Stewart, 2014). As there are fifteen Enduring Understandings, six are allocated to the category of Creating. With a strong emphasis on experimentation, invention, and discovery, the standards recognize the importance of developing and practicing skills and habits. (Steward, 2014, p.8). After creating the work, the next key component to successfully implementing the 2014 standards is to present the work.

### **Presenting**

The second category of standards is Presenting. Following the creation process, the act of presentation allows for the sharing of an idea, and the formation of novel ideas. The Presenting standards make explicit something that always has had a place in art education—the practice of presenting or displaying student work. (Stewart, 2014). The standards associated with this category, go beyond showcasing the work of the student and allow for further investigation into exhibition spaces, both traditional and non-conformist.

### **Responding**

The third category of standards is Responding. A natural progression in thought after presenting the work is to respond to the work. The Responding standards reflect an understanding of our tendency to pay attention to and “read” what we see, to make sense of our visual world. These standards take seriously our inclination to look for, find, and construct

meaning. With increasing sophistication, students recognize and explain how their responses to the natural world, constructed environments, and visual imagery shift and change depending on context (Stewart, 2014, p. 9). Students construct meaning through their interpretation, and the framing of the artwork, how it relates to the continuum of the visual world.

### **Connecting**

The fourth, and final key group of standards, is Connecting. This group of standards allows students to connect the artwork, or the work of fellow student-artists, or contemporary artists to that of the larger world. With artmaking experiences as a catalyst, the second strand of Connecting standards situates artmaker and artmaking processes firmly in the world, reinforcing the notion that in artmaking, alone or with others, we draw upon personal experience—our stories, our perceptions, events, and traditions in our communities—and try on alternate ways to see and understand the world (Stewart, 2014, p.10). Students are encouraged to reflect deeply upon their own personal meaning and connect it to the world we live within.

### **Big Ideas & Design**

One approach to formulating or finding the big ideas within curriculum is the approach known as “Backwards Design”. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2013) propose deliberate and focused instructional design requires us as teachers and curriculum writers to make an important shift in our thinking about the nature of our job (p. 14). I believe this approach to curriculum design is successful because the focus is on learning rather than teaching. To take this approach to develop a curriculum, one can incorporate design thinking modalities. First, identify the desired results, Second, determine acceptable evidence, Third, plan learning experiences, and instruction (Wiggins, 2013, p. 18). This approach to curriculum design works well with the theory of instruction known as choice-based art education.

Within art education, there are several different approaches to instruction, some more successful than others. Jaquith (2011) writes some teachers engage learners in discussions that promote divergent thinking toward solving an assigned problem. Other teachers avoid stages of problem finding altogether by assigning a problem to students with no discussion, and students resort to convergent thinking with limited access to creativity in their artmaking. In self-directed learning, the teacher's role shifts from instructor to facilitator, living resource, and guide. (p.17). This approach to learning allows for students to develop as artists, critical thinkers, and leaders.

### **Application and Personal Reflection**

Based on the readings, I have concluded my teaching style, and focus has been rooted in the 2014 Standards, while my own educational journey k-12 was taught through the lens of the 1994 Standards. For this reason, I am hyper-aware of the similarities and differences between the two systems of learning.

The previous standards from 1994, along with the 2014 standards both focus on similar key ideas of :1. knowledge and skills, 2. philosophical foundations, and 3. lifelong goals the standards from which my own K-12 artmaking and understanding arose were these standards. From 1994 to 2014 the focus of the standards was for 1. clustered grade bands, 2. six content standards, and 3. paper-based artmaking. Content and Achievement have been replaced with Anchor and Performance Standards. Unique Formats Across Arts Disciplines have been replaced with Parallel Format Among Arts and Disciplines (Stewart, 2014). Standards have been updated and evolved to fit the evolution of the internet, up to the Web 2.0 phase. A focus on achievement or the result has been replaced with attention to the process of artmaking or the performance of the student-artist.

Within my own teaching practice, I implore three key classroom interventions proposed by Diane B. Jaquith in *Art Education*, January 2011. First, Organizing lessons around intrinsic motivators, including choice, play, divergent thinking, and making relevant connections, Second, Restructure lessons to give learners ownership of problem finding as well as problem-solving, and Third, Focus more on process than product and look forward to a surprise of open-ended solutions (Jaquith, 2011). I believe by focusing on student choice, rather than teacher-prescribed action, students can take ownership of their artmaking. Art, similar, to other life necessities such as clothing, or food; when a student can make their own choices their decision making, creativity, and personality are undeniably made present. The teacher becomes a facilitator or meaningful decision making, rather the persona for a predetermined outcome. This was much the case during my own k-12 artmaking, before the 2014 standards. Much of the artwork was focused on mirroring European oil paintings, predominately made for and from only one race, social class, and religious background. This modality of teaching not only stifles creativity but hinders an understanding of art history from Lascaux to Kusama.

Within the umbrella of choice-based art education, I favor the approach known as Teaching for Artistic Behavior. In this model the classroom is seen as an art studio; well organized. Each class begins with a demonstration of the materials, stations, or ideas being explored. (Douglas, 2012) Students work independently, or collaboratively at each station, or table. Students learn not only from the teacher (audio, kinesthetic, visual), but from additional instructions printed (visual), and from each other (kinesthetic). Students also learn from resources, and supplemental materials (visual, audio).

One of the greatest challenges facing art educators is the speed at which technology is evolving, and the adaptation of new technology, ideas, and knowledge. For this reason, I choose

to teach through a choice-based approach to learning. Not only is this approach backward comparable with traditional media such as paint, graphite, and pastel; but it also adapts well for a S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics) classroom. Materials and stations can be adapted to fit the needs and interests of the students while allowing the educator to control which materials fit with the big idea being explored.

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