

Teaching for Artistic Behavior

Brian Testa

University of Florida

ARE6049

Dr. Hunter-Doniger

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Abstract

This paper will reflect on the core tenants of the Teaching for Artistic Behavior movement within the idea of choice-based art education. Within this paper are the key historical figures of TAB, how students and teachers interact within TAB, how the classroom is set up. Questions of the inspiration for such an idea, the 2014 national visual art, and design standards, and STEAM are addressed. Connections are drawn between the Froebelian model of kindergarten education and the importance of choice-based art education. Conclusions are drawn from my experience teaching for both public and private institutions. Methodologies apply within the traditional classroom matrix, hybrid models of instruction, and online or remote learning.

Introduction

Play

Approaches to teaching curriculum, teaching students, and models of education have gone through many changes, as the pendulum swings through time. Upon critical analysis of choice-based education, I find it crucial to consider the Froebelian model used at the genesis of kindergarten education. There are three key components of the Froebelian model: sensory learning, symbolism, and self-activity or play. Each component acts to nurture development and to allow for self-consciousness. This model of education also places a strong emphasis on the use of physical objects, as opposed to abstract concepts and indoctrination. Teaching through the Froebelian method evokes a set of patterns and tasks to be reproduced by the child to “teach” the gifts (Sienkiewicz, 2001). Kindergarten and Art Education share common ground in the pedagogical approach. Both are concerned with the manipulation of materials, the development and awakening of the senses, and the unfolding of creativity in the child.

Choice

Choice-based education began in the 1970s as a prelogical approach that allowed large groups of students to make choices. Students worked at centers where their ideas could be manifested through choices in media and techniques. Students are encouraged to explore their ideas alongside their fellow artists. Rich studio settings allowed for artmaking indistinguishable from play. Fifty years after the inception of choice-based education the term has become an umbrella term that encompasses the Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Teaching for Artistic Behavior, or TAB.

Artistic Behavior

Teaching for Artistic Behavior is a grassroots art education movement that started in America, in the 1970s and has grown in popularity ever since. TAB is a nationally recognized, choice-based: learning-centers approach to teaching art. Developed in Massachusetts classrooms over twenty-five years, and through courses and research at the Massachusetts College of Art, this concept allows students to experience the work of the artist through teaching which is responsive to their needs and interests. The essence of this approach to art education can be summarized by three main ideas:

- A). What do Artists Do?
- B). The Student is the Artist.
- C). The Art room is the Student's studio.

Teaching for artistic behavior offers a clear philosophy and structure to develop the mind of young artists through choice.

Summary

Key Figures

The teaching for artistic behavior or TAB movement within the push for choice-based art education was the culmination of over forty years of research and development. Two key figures in this movement were Katherine M. Douglas and Diane Jaquith. Douglas is a cofounder of Teaching for Artistic Behavior, Inc. TAB, Inc. supports teachers who practice choice-based education. After teaching elementary art education for 26 years Douglas continues to foster collaboration as a presenter at conferences, co-director of the Summer Institute at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. In 2017 she was named the Massachusetts Art Educator of the Year.

Jaquith recently retired after teaching for 25 years in public art education. She co-directs the Summer Institute and is a co-founder of TAB. Jaquith has contributed numerous articles and presentations at conferences promoting her findings.

Inception & Expansion

In the early 1970s, TAB co-founder Katherine Douglas set out to manage poor scheduling, few supplies, and 960 students per week (Roell, n.d.). In the summer of 1974, she taught a summer program designed for mixed ages, with material areas set up for choice. Over the next twenty years, Douglas adapted her teaching and began presenting with Pauline Joseph. Joseph had developed a similar teaching method that was implemented in her district nearby. In the early 90's Diane Jaquith joined the grassroots movement and influenced the popularity within the art education community.

In an interview with the Art of Education Magazine, co-founder Katherine Douglas notes the expansion of the movement through social media. Douglas states, "Over the years we have hosted many regional gatherings in studio classrooms, teachers' homes, museums, and retreat venues."

What do Artists Do

One of the main tenants of the teaching for artistic behavior model comes directly from the considerations of practicing artists. Considerations of how artists work, and the realization no single or group of artistic behaviors is common to all (Douglas, Jaquith, & Thompson 2018). Artistic habits are as individual as people are unique. Keith Haring writes about this unique individuality, "I am me. I may look like you, but if you take a closer look you will realize that I am nothing like you at all. I am very different. I see things from a completely different

perspective...I may be wearing the same shoes and the same haircut, but that gives you no right to have any preconceived notions about what I am or who I am (Haring, 1996).

Choice-based models of art education answer the problem that is there is no one lesson, and no one approach to instruction that will satisfy all the curiosities, interests, and personalities in a classroom of learners (Douglas, Jaquith, & Thompson 2018). A curriculum that both is inherently flexible and adaptable to student needs acts to motivate students to create meaningful work. Artistic behavior cannot be taught but the art educator can teach for artistic behaviors to emerge. Instruction and assessment do not focus on the result or product but rather the process.

The Student is the Artist

Another key component of TAB is allowing students to explore materials, ideas, subjects, and approaches. This approach to learning draws similarities to the Froebelian model of education. Teaching through the Froebelian method evokes a set of patterns and tasks to be reproduced by the child to “teach” the gifts (Sienkiewicz, 2001). Kindergarten and Art Education share common ground in the pedagogical approach. Both are concerned with the manipulation of materials, the development and awakening of the senses, and the unfolding of creativity in the child. The child and not isolated facts become the focus of education when the many products the young child made were considered worthy of analysis and accepted as evidence of mental growth. (Sienkiewicz, 2001).

TAB allows for a continuation of the ideas presented in a Froebelian model. Art that is created from the meaningful context of young artist’s lives enhances relevancy and authenticity. Students who take control over their work are invested and have incentives to take risks (Douglas, Jaquith, & Thompson 2018). Students are encouraged to find their criteria for determining the success and completion of their work.

The Student's Studio

The final component of TAB is creating a space for students to explore their ideas. TAB classrooms are carefully constructed and organized centers of creative exploration. Studio centers, similar to classroom learning centers, provide access to multiple choices in the art room (Douglas, Jaquith, & Thompson 2018). Students are encouraged to explore an idea at stations or learning hubs. Careful scheduling is maintained by the TAB teacher.

To the untrained eye, teaching for artistic behavior may appear simple and easy to manage. This illusion is the result of a skilled educator. Successful choice-based teachers invest significant time preparing the learning environment while planning lessons and investigating strategies to improve student learning. The outcome of this hard work is a smoothly functioning art studio for independent work (Douglas, Jaquith, & Thompson 2018). Students take ownership of their work, their workspace, and their body of work.

In Practice

In an authentic choice-based environment, students have control over subject matter, materials, and approach. As art is created from the meaningful content of students' lives, teachers will find that interesting issues related to multiculturalism and visual culture will arise (Loom, p. 6). The choice is the main organizational method of teaching with this method. TAB learning environments feature stations or centers for students to explore materials. Self-directed study results in students creating uniquely diverse artwork.

The TAB approach to art-making frees the art educator from designing projects that mirror a famous artist, or perhaps their work. The student is seen as the Artist who has the authority to make creative choices, determine the process, and generate their interpretation. The foundation of this practice is the belief in the student as an artist, which places primary control and decision-

making in the hands of the student rather than the teacher. Choice-based art education offers students real control (Cotter, 2002).

Standards & Elements

Studying the design elements and principles should not be the starting point for contemporary art educators. The National Core Art Standards challenge the educator to look towards Big Ideas. The standards are, “a process that guides educators in providing unified quality arts education for students in Pre-K through high school” (National Visual Arts Standards, 2014). The core anchor standards of Creating, Presenting, Responding and Connecting allow for exploration beyond defining and coping with the 7 + 7 classical elements. Curriculum-based on exploration and the creative process as a whole fit within the process of teaching for artistic behavior. Curriculum-based on Big Ideas allows for student-centered exploration.

Conclusions

Connecting Past to Present

Rather than students creating projects that mirror one another, students are encouraged to engage in play with materials. Students develop their creativity and explore how to execute ideas from their minds. Art history and STEAM can be easily incorporated into the TAB classroom. Activities such as “the teachable moment” facilitate discussion of art history. During work time, if a student seems to have a problem the educator can conjure up an image of a famous artwork or another student artist's work for inspiration. In a teacher-directed art program, the material covered, artists studied, and methods explored can often mirror the teacher’s college art history class. Cliche lessons based on “Van Gogh’s Sunflowers” or “Picasso Portraits” transform the art class into a fine art appreciation class. (Papanicolaou p. 9).

Thoughtful Connections

21st-century art curriculum should be centered around encouraging differences and going beyond the classical or modernist principles and elements of art and design. One approach to this would be to structure an art curriculum that allows for strong immersion and interaction with the creative process. Allowing students to become fully engaged in the process of creation, allowing for “Flow”. Flow is the state of concentration and engagement that can be achieved when completing a task that involves a whole body-mind presence. The theory was formulated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who suggests that “the actual quality of life—what we do, and how we feel about it—will be determined by our thoughts and emotions; by the interpretations, we give to chemical, biological, and social processes” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 4). Students can look within and discover connections in and around them with a harmonious mind-body presence, as a result of exploration. Culturally responsive teachers can communicate the styles of different ethnic groups, and how stylistic differences reflect cultural values and act to shape learning behaviors. Understanding and celebrating cultural differences allow for artmaking to take on a personal connection and take root in something timeless within each student; allowing them to reflect on their own culture.

Influences on Beliefs and Practices

The interactive nature of choice-based pedagogy, with differentiation embedded into all aspects of the practice, allows teachers and students to find what works best for them and to learn from each other (Jaquith, Hathaway & Fahey, 2012). TAB classrooms and choice-based art education are not limited to younger artists. Students in middle and high school can thrive from a curriculum that allows for personal ownership of one’s artmaking.

Modern approaches to engaging students using real-world problems allow for STEM to be incorporated into the TAB classroom. STEAM, or Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics is an approach to teaching that focuses on not what you know, but what you can do with what you know (Quigley & Herro, 2019). Proponents of STEAM argue that incorporating Art into STEM thinking is essential for innovation, collaboration, and for preventing the disconnection of math and science from real-world applications.

Within my teaching practice, I incorporate the ideas proposed in the 1970s through TAB with a modern approach to the tools being used. Studio centers and stations of the TAB classroom can be seen as a precursor to the Maker Space design centers found in STEAM programs today. The idea of stations or centers of learning can be adapted based on the classroom environment, the number of student-artists, and the materials available.

This approach to teaching is particularly relevant in the current educational climate of remote learning, hybrid teaching, and messy scheduling. By allowing students choices, such as choice of material, issues such as lack of supplies, are eradicated. Choices can lead to creative solutions to problems centered on lack, or frustration. By allowing students to explore a Big Idea on their terms, students are not fighting over the chance to use a specific supply, students watching the class from home are not made to feel left out by watching students engage with materials. Students learning from home can utilize traditionally, found, and unique materials they have access to within their own homes. If paint is not available to discuss color theory, colorful laundry, autumn leaves or nail polish could act as a substitute.

As a result of the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic students and parents are given choices as to where to school their child, and how. I feel it is paramount to extend these choices to the art classroom, allowing students to have a say in what they explore.

In a TAB program, students are artists. The connections students find within art history are based on personal experiences and interests. A strong focus is on the creative process itself, rather than the result. This key movement in the history of art education can be summarized by Pauline Joseph in the following quote, “The job of the artist is to have an art idea and find the best medium to express it, or, to use a material which leads to an idea.

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