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Teaching Philosophy

21st Century Skills & Higher Level Thinking

Education is preparation for life. While in school, students should not only acquire essential knowledge in the core subjects, but should also attain skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly global society. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, these include creativity / innovation, critical thinking / problem solving, and communication / collaboration¹. When designing art lessons, my essential goal is to lead students to acquire these skills. I ask them to choose or invent subject matter and symbols to communicate specific ideas or emotions. I ask them to solve design problems given a specific set of criteria. I ask them to look closely at master artworks, interpret their meanings, think critically about their place in history, society, and culture, and evaluate their success. I also ask them to collaborate on group projects in which each student plays a role and shares a responsibility. Through art they learn and practice skills necessary to succeed in higher education and in life.

Connections to Core Subjects and Common Core Standards

Art can also be a key to unlocking a student's interest in the core subjects. Most of my art lessons connect to language arts, math, science, and social studies. In a landscape lesson, students were introduced to artist Georgia O'Keefe, who lived in New Mexico and is well known for her desert paintings. They learned about the American Southwest, including the landforms, plants, animals, and climate found there. When they created their landscape drawings, they included these elements, and used colors to make their deserts appear hot. In addition to connecting to other subjects, I also incorporate the common core standards during conversations about art and reflective writing assignments. Every moment counts during a school day, and students in my art class are always engaged in content that is relevant to their overall learning.

Differentiation

Every child can learn, and I design my lessons to ensure that every child will reach a level of success. In most lessons I include supporting activities that fit various learning styles. In a color lesson students sang a song about primary colors. To help them remember various types of lines, they moved their arms to mimic the lines. Differentiation also occurs when students are given the choice of subject matter for their art based on their personal interests, culture, or heritage. When students struggle with an assignment, I provide stencils, visual references, or posters with step-by-step instructions. Students are also assigned an "Art Buddy," or a peer tutor to provide additional support. Those who display advanced talent in art are given more challenging elements to add to their work. No matter what artistic level of the child, he or she should feel successful in my classroom.

Art Appreciation

My teaching leads students to practice 21st century skills, achieve higher levels of thinking, connect to core content in meaningful way, and achieve success. But I am also concerned about preparing children to grow into adults who value and appreciate the arts. Every child will not become an artist, nor should they. However, art is the manifestation of human creativity, ingenuity, and beauty. It reflects a society's history, culture, and values. Art is what people leave behind for others to find and cherish. The world needs individuals who understand, appreciate, protect, and support the arts. I strive to provide my students with a quality education in art so that they might grow to become those individuals.

¹ Partnership for 21st Century Skills, <http://www.p21.org>