



A Very Hungry Horse: The Problem with Art Programs in Public School

Nicole Yang ¹

¹ Department of Visual Arts, College of the Arts, California State University, Fullerton, USA

Abstract

Picasso said he spent a few years learning to draw like Raphael and a lifetime trying to draw like children. As childhood art educators, it is our job to inform and enlighten their minds and show them the limitlessness of their abilities. The core of art education should be centered on creativity and storytelling. It is crucial for children between the ages of seven and nine to recognize how their ideas develop into drawings. These are the most prolific years in a child's life to spark and deepen their ability to adapt and come up with ideas. Unfortunately the current state of art curriculum in public schools does not allow for this kind of growth and knowledge. The designated art curriculum of today centers on replicating and mimicking existing artwork as opposed to creating an outlet for individual style.

The current content standards set forth by the State of California in the subject of Visual Arts greatly lack any substantial effort in developing creativity. In the Creative Expression category, the target learning objectives are vague at best with little to no indication of teaching students how to have their own ideas. Instead, the focus seems to be on concepts of mixing colors and drawing from observational sources such as art history and objects in daily life.

To teach children that realism is the only qualifying attribute of good art is to take away all their creativity and put a cap on their artistic potential. The only way to become creators is by surpassing reality, not imitating it. Realism is little more than a tool to advance our own ideas, not as a crutch for not having any. Realism is a skill, not a talent.

Keywords: Hungry Horse, artist, Creative Expression, Imaginative, Visual arts, Original Works

CHAPTER 1

THE CURRENT STATE

The Standards

All children are artists and are far more creative than their adult counterparts tend to give them credit for. The pedagogy of early art education should be rooted in the belief of enhancing problem solving skills as well as promoting a platform for overall growth. The focus should be on their ideas and the stories they tell. We spend so much time trying to teach children how to excel in academia and how to take tests. We place all the focus on memorizing answers we forget to show them how to ask questions.

Too many kids graduate high school and sometimes even college without the practical skills that really prepare them to take care of themselves and deal with everyday situations. They lack the ability to have opinions, common sense and above all, confidence. Most of these areas can be easily combated with proper early life education especially in areas of creativity and problem solving.

The Visual Arts Content Standards set by the state of California breaks down all aspects of art into five generic categories: 1. Artistic perception, 2. Creative Expression, 3. Historical and Cultural Context, 4. Aesthetic Valuing, and 5. Connections, Relationships, Applications. Within these categories are subsections with examples of key learning points to target within that age group.

In the third grade standards for example, under 2. Creative Expression (Skills, Processes, Materials, and Tools) Students are to explore ideas for art in a personal sketchbook and mix and apply tempera paints to create tints, shades, and neutral colors. Under Communication and Expression Through Original Works of Art, they are to paint or draw a landscape, seascape, or cityscape that shows the illusion of space and create a work of art based on the observation of objects and scenes in daily life, emphasizing value changes.

Not only are the standards ambiguous and broad, they set up key terms like “imaginative” and “explore” without any further explanation to what exactly they mean by them. How exactly is the student supposed to be “imaginative”? What do they have to do in order to “explore”? Furthermore they place the requirement of “art based on observation of objects and scenes in daily life” under the umbrella of Creative Expression, which is arguably the biggest flaw in these standards.

For most teachers who use these preset standards to write their lesson plans, they stumble at the grading portion of these art projects because they are ill-prepared to determine the measure of good art



Figure 1. Imaginative?

So What Makes Art Good?

Children at this age, their minds are the most malleable with neuroplasticity at its highest. Their motor functions and hand-eye coordination have the most potential for growth and their minds are the most open. It should be the goal of every art educator to take advantage of this highly developmental time in a child’s life.

In order to properly discuss this, let us first establish what exactly art is and what makes it “good”? The American writer, poet, and philosopher, Henry David Thoreau said, “The world is but a canvas to our imagination.” Art came into existence because the reality of the world is just not enough. In short, art is simply “things, but better”, “stuff, but more”. (Thoreau) Art is a creation established by humans as a way of making ordinary things be more than they are.

So what makes it good? There is a never-ending line of scholars, critics and artists who are dying to tell you. The truth is, the intrinsic worth of art fundamentally lies in the ideas behind it. It is not the what, when, where, who or how. These superficial concepts are easily obtained through many types and search online sources. My perpetual interest lies in the “why”, the part that is not concrete. The “why” is the hardest part to talk about and even harder to teach. And unfortunately art in public schools tend to address everything but.

The basic fundamental flaw in the current art curriculum is that the extremely specialized subject is being taught and tested as if it were any other subject in school. The approach is one of methodical processes and qualifiable context with the ultimate goal of standardized testing. The public education system has always been deeply rooted on the idea of facts on an almost tangible level. This type of curriculum is one based on memorization and then regurgitation of these facts. And it seems to be that the only way to prove how good a teacher is at teaching is the sheer quantity of facts they can get their students to memorize regardless of any actual understanding.

Unfortunately when this same approach is taken towards the visual arts, it becomes clear that art is not a subject of facts and testing. When it comes to art, it is the opinions of the individual that become the most important. By definition, an opinion is a belief or judgment that rests on data insufficient to produce complete certainty. Clearly not appropriate grounds for successful test-taking. Art thus becomes a place for free interpretation. Art becomes the birth of ideas, a place for invention

Just Another Test

The great American painter, teacher and art philosopher Robert Henri believed art to inspire life and good art, the breath of creativity. “The mere copying, without understanding can hardly be called drawing. Realize that a drawing is not a copy, a drawing is an invention.” (Henri) What defines good art lies in its pursuit of the new; the invention of original thoughts. A well conceived art lesson considers the individuality of each student and offers room for growth and interpretation within its objectives. A good lesson plan is not simply about making the end result look a certain way. A good lesson opens doors for discovery throughout. The forum of public education unfortunately falls very short of this.

In a typical lesson plan given in art class, a teacher chooses a famous artist from history and gives a brief presentation of the artist’s life. They talk about where they were born and what kind of life they led. They dissect the artist’s process and materials and when and where they drew and painted and sculpted and created. They talk about dates and places and all things facts. An exceptional teacher might mention the inspirations behind the artist’s work.

At the end of the lecture the teacher projects the final image of the day, the most notorious piece. And the students begin to paint their own version of this artwork. The teacher walks them through the steps and helps them fix their mistakes along the way. They mix the right colors, draw the right flowers, and paint the right strokes. And at the end of these efforts, 28 copies of this masterpiece hang on the wall. After clean up the students gather and the teacher gives a quick quiz on when the artist was born and what city they grew up in.

We spend years of our lives learning facts, memorizing dates, taking tests, solving for x and regurgitating all of these things to prove our level of knowledge. We drown in a sea of facts hoping to catch wind of an opinion or an idea. We are so concerned with memorizing the right answers that we never stop to ask any questions.

Jamie Myrick, a teacher at Adams Middle School in Richmond, California reflects these same concerns in art studies, "With the push from No Child Left Behind to focus on testing, arts and education are treated as if they're not compatible. People are forgetting that math is taught when a child is playing an instrument. English is taught when a child is reading or writing a script. Critical thinking is taught when a child is analyzing art." (Myrick) Without the push for critical thinking at this age, children do not retain most of what they learn in school.

Children remember much more when they feel like they are a part of the creation process. The key moments of your childhood that you remember best are the times where you created something on your own. You remember the stories you wrote, or the pictures you drew, not the tests you take of the answers you forgot.

Where is the Learning?

When we try to standardize art and bring the scale of realism to qualify abilities, we turn art into facts. When in actuality the facts are the easiest part. It is about color, line, shading, value, perspective, scale; tangible concepts. Creativity is much harder to teach. Realism is much easier to test, therefore making it easier to teach. If your sky is not the right blue, you should add more blue. If your apples are not round enough, you should make them rounder. If your cat's ears happen to be too round, you should make them more pointy. The shading on your mountain needs to be smoother, I suggest you smooth it out.

What about asking what kind of animals fly in your sky? If apples could talk, what would they say? What would your cat do if his fur was too hot? What does he do in the summer? Does he go on vacation? How do you think these mountains got there?

What makes mountains grow bigger or smaller? Asking conceptual questions like these are a much more difficult way to teach because you are not relying on copying images or regurgitation of facts or numbers. It is about how much the students are willing to think and how much effort they put into their ideas.

For most of a child's life, they are constantly being told what to do and how to do it. When they finally have a chance to be make art, it should be about internal discoveries. According to W.Lambert Brittain, author of *Creativity, Art, and the Young Child*, "The child's personality often shines through loud and clear when he or she draws or paints, for example, the little red-headed boy who drew red-haired boys in striped T-shirts. No one doubted whom the drawings represented. These drawings by young children are typically egocentric." Brittain says that "Art activities not only reflect a child's inner self: they help form it." (Brittain, 105) More often than not, art is one of the only places where children can be free to make their own mistakes and learn about themselves through their journey.

Learning is not about reading the question and then reading the answer. Learning lies within the pause between the question and the discovery of the answer. It is not all about the answer itself, it is about the journey that took them there. True growth comes from asking questions, enhancing ideas and teaching them how to think. Kids often cannot quite communicate their ideas and stories fully but the most important thing is that you let them have these stories. It is up to their educators to encourage them to get better, think more and ask questions.

CHAPTER 2

THE APPLE DOES NOT FALL FAR

So You Want To Be An Art Teacher

The decision to become an elementary teacher should come with more than a set study plan for prerequisites and guides to passing exams. The fundamental flaw presented here is actually the lack of education in education itself. How can we expect the future teachers of today to be well equipped with the skills and abilities to create a proper curriculum if we do not first establish one that teaches them exactly how to do so? In turn we are being affected by the problems we create ourselves.

Teachers should do more than read from a book or talk about things they have memorized. It's not just about the drawing. Can they create something from their imaginations? Can they think on their feet, break the mold, challenge the box? There is so much more to the job than coloring with kids. As an art educator, you have to not only be innovative in your approach to learning but also incredibly adaptive when teaching.

Regrettably the current system of teacher training greatly lacks development of these crucial traits.

Credential Program

It seems the root of these problems in teaching starts with the lack of a strong education system for the teachers themselves. In order to become credentialed to teach, there are a number of units in each area that must be taken. A typical undergrad curriculum at a State College or University consists of 120 units, which are then broken down into core requirements for each major, academic requirements such as English and Math classes, and elective units which can be taken in other areas of study. Within the Bachelors of Arts program, those who wish to focus on the teaching concentration will go into the Credential Program for teaching art for grades K-8th or K-12th.

This consists of taking 30 units of major preparation classes or roughly two semesters, which include Beginning Drawing, Beginning Painting, and Beginning Ceramics as well as Three -Dimensional Design and Intro to Art History. The next 24 units are left up to the students personal dispositions and can be chosen from a myriad of areas like Illustration, Jewelry Making, Creative Photography, and Computer Assisted Graphics. Beyond that they have the required academic classes and other remaining electives that total 120 units.

Nowhere in this study plan is it required that they take any classes on the psychology of children and the effects of art development at an early age. Instead, they spend only a few semesters of their time taking beginner classes across the spectrum of all things art related while never becoming proficient in any targeted areas. Essentially earning the appropriate moniker, "Jack of all trades, Master of none".

The Jack of All

It is believed these collegiate study plans are written in this manor to help introduce potential art teachers to many areas of visual arts in order to expose them to everything and be ready to respond to interest in any area. Although, the quality of the "response" doesn't seem to be a key factor. With less than one year's worth of training in all beginner level classes, they are somehow at the end of their artistic development. This would be the equivalent of sending your child to a music class where the teacher only has a few months worth of experience with every kind of instrument without really knowing how to read music. It is no wonder so few teachers actually achieve any level of learning in the classroom when they are so technically unprepared themselves.

A better form of academic training would be for teachers in their early education years to tackle the first levels of multiple disciplines but with the ultimate goal of advancing in just one. Instead of years and years of 100 level courses, proceed to master their chosen talent through 400 level senior courses and hands on experience. A well-versed teacher has the unique ability to take their classrooms to a much higher level. They would be able to deepen their lesson plans and offer a more advanced approach to their chosen field as opposed to limiting their student's exposure to mere beginnings.

When teachers fail to excel in one specific field, ceramics for example, their student's work will never get past the first stages of growth and will instead remain suppressed in the 100 level equivalent. Instead of being able to create sculptures of their favorite fairy tale villains, they will only be guided to make coil pots and clay bowls.

The way teachers were educated will directly affect how all of their future students will learn. Once their formal education comes to an end, they are required to prove proficiency in the form of a standardized test, as the case always seems to be in a system that praises memorization over imagination.

Testing, Testing

CSET

The California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) is required for all teachers who teach between Kindergarten and Sixth grade. The test is a broad overview for all subject matters including a small section devoted to the arts. The English and Math categories tally to over 50 questions while the visual arts section is reduced to just 4 out of the already limited Arts section. A sample art question from the test is, "The American Indian cultures of California developed which of the following art forms to a high level of technical and aesthetic excellence? A) bead work, B) weaving, C) coil pottery, or D) basketry" This question seems more appropriate under the History umbrella rather than the Visual Arts. It has nothing to do with creativity and nothing to do with original ideas. These questions pose no real world challenges but instead measure the amount of memorization one person can manage. Yet teachers who pass this test are officially certified to teach all subjects, including art. The reason this type of curriculum is still allowed relates back to the common misconceptions of how to measure good art.

Most people believe the quality of art lies in its resemblance to something real or tangible. They are in fact treating the creative mind with the same preconception as they would approach a standardized test. Creativity does not operate under notions of true and false, right or wrong. It thrives in an environment of growth and adaptations. It lives in a perpetual state of change that keeps it charged and motivated. It comes from the part of us that dares to ask questions and go against the grain. If we implement material

standards to judge something so infinite, how can we expect kids to grow and understand what they are capable of? When you give something so abstract such a concrete goal, you are essentially already setting limits for these young children. These limits begin to stifle their confidence and thus turn into handicaps in their adult lives.

Real Limitations

If the measure of good art is in its realistic qualities, then real is the limit. It is essential during this critical point of growth in children to encourage questions and thought. When they are so used to seeing the goals laid out in front of them before they even make an attempt on their own, they start to rely on answers before questions and thus become dependent on predisposed knowledge and given truths. When the answers are laid out before us, why bother looking for questions? Why would you draw out of your head when there are perfectly good apples to copy right in front of you?

If creativity is the breath that brings art to life, then these notions of truths based on what is already there, are the beginning of the end of originality. Art's primary objective should be to bring out the child's personality. Viktor Lowenfeld, in his treatise, *Creative and Mental Growth*, says, "To suppress these individual differences, to emphasize the final product, to reward one youngster over another, goes against the basic premises of creative expression." (Lowenfeld, 59) In other words, the process is more important than the product. The journey to the answer is more important than knowing exactly what the answer is.

If you teach them to always seek to copy a perceived truth, like the way an apple looks or the colors of a sunset, you tell them they are only as good as something they can imitate. In Figure 2, Angelina (6) turns in a homework assignment with the prompt, "Draw an animal that starts with the letter 'F'. Draw some food for him that also starts with the letter 'F'. Draw a house for him and OVERLAP. Add a GROUNDLINE!".

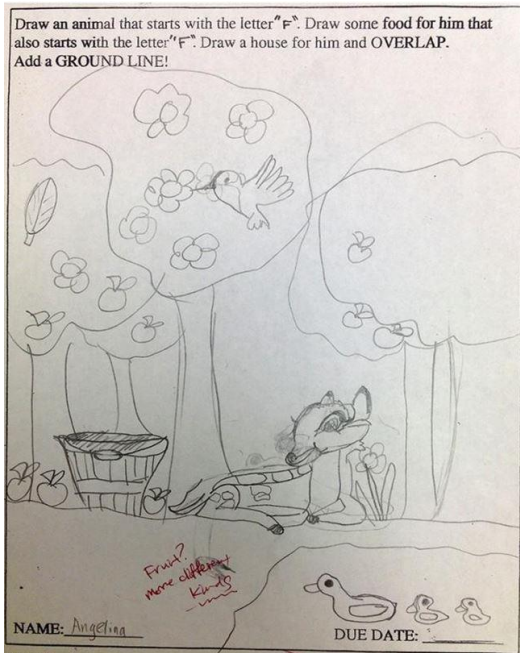


Figure 2. A Fawn

Her response to the prompt was a "Fawn" but she failed to answer the rest of the prompt. It is clear that this student

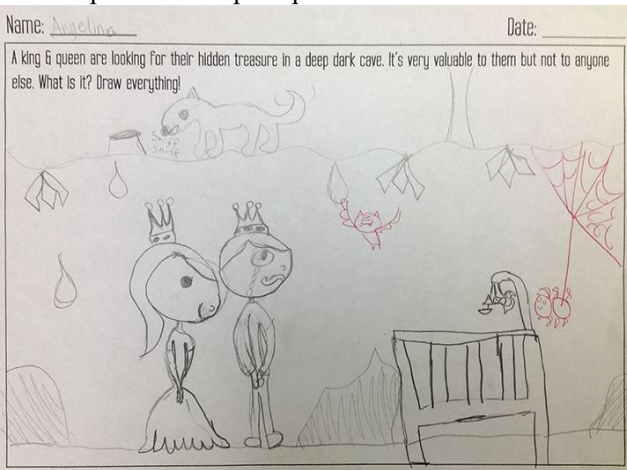


Figure 3. A Lost Treasure

had some help from someone who gave her an image of the Disney character, Bambi to copy for this assignment. Even though the drawing itself looks fairly "advance" for a six year old, the anatomy of the fawn is destroyed in her attempt to copy a two dimensional illustration done in the style of another artist. There are classic signs of a lack of confidence in her line work as shown in her repeated attempts coupled with heavy erasing. Also in her time spent trying to mimic another artist, she failed to complete the assignment.

In Figure 3, Angelina again turns in a homework assignment with this prompt, "A king and queen are looking for hidden treasure in a deep dark cave. It is very valuable to them but not to anyone else. What is it? Draw everything!"

When left to their own thoughts, young minds can create and invent worlds far beyond the grasps of most adults. But when you let them get away with just replicating reality and never having to think about the "whys" their minds become stifled and never get accustomed to asking these important questions. Why are there so many different kinds of apples? Why are sunsets so many different colors but the sky seems to just be blue?

The emphasis should always be on the thoughts behind their art. It is in these efforts that make their world good. Much like the rest of life, when you care about what you make, it becomes so much better. This is especially true for children. Try and remember your fondest memories from childhood. It's probably not all the amazing tests you took or the number of answers you got right. Those dates and formulas do not quite have the same resonance. The things you remember are the ones you created, the feelings that just came to you as if pulled from some ether of thought.

Children are the most susceptible to this type of memory. When they are young their brains fire at a much different speed and direction. At this age they are the most malleable for growth and change. Unfortunately most art curriculums do not take full advantage of this potential. Instead they rely on superficial imitation. The argument for this is that art is art and at the end of the day, how do you teach them to draw?

Teachers use preconceived notions of fundamental art concepts like shading, blind contour, and linear perspective without truly understanding what these concepts mean or how to use these to enrich their student's work. Essentially, they only teach things they can test but the only good test for these types of concepts in art lies in the comprehension of these elements and how to use them to express their ideas fully. If a child uses shading to enhance the apple, do they truly understand how to wrap a three dimensional form? If they draw a city street in perspective, have they actually learned how perspective works in the real world and thus can apply it to any drawing? Or have they simply copied something a teacher showed them? Instead of blind mimicking, we should be showing them how to see things and analyze their forms. Teachers should be showing them these concepts as a skill they can apply to their own ideas but it should not be the only things they learn.

In following the California State Standards for writing lesson plans in Visual arts, they are to fulfill the five subcategories, one of which is 2.0 Creative Expression. Being in the fourth grade they are to use shading (value) to transform a two-dimensional shape into what appears to be a three-dimensional form or a circle into a sphere. What it should read is, "Students should be able to understand the visual difference between a two-dimensional shape and three-dimensional form." Although better yet, "Students should be able to create an original story from their imagination and draw all the visual components which include objects that are visually two-dimensional and also three-dimensional."

Standards exist because public education needs to be held accountable for the degree of learning that is met per grade level. But the only way to truly inspire is to limit the limitations. The best way to actually gauge how to measure learning at each grade is to spend time in a real classroom with real children.

Real Alive Children

As a professor of Art and Child Development, (a 300 level college course) there are too many students who get to this point in their education to become teachers who just have no real world experience in dealing with actual children. This becomes apparent when they write lesson plans that would absolutely not work in a real classroom setting. They have no idea what it is like to be in a room filled with twenty-five 8 year olds and try to teach them how to draw. They are poorly prepared for both the mental process and the physical limitations. While 8 year olds are extremely capable, the time allotted for art lessons in public school does not make room for lesson plans that would take 10 hours to complete and having zero experience in time management at this point is just unacceptable.

The road to becoming a teacher should begin with immersive externship training while most institutions have that as a post graduation requirement. Teachers go through four years of classes but never get hands-on contact with children until after they already have their degree. This type of program gives them no room to actually experience the daily trials and tribulations of being a teacher and offers no insight to its rewards. In order to properly assess one's desired career path, they should fully immerse themselves in that world as early as possible. They absolutely should not wait until their formal education is completed to make a decision.

Once again this relates back to the notion that teaching art is just about memorization and technique building that can be taught out of a book a few weeks at a time. Teachers who cannot present a solid understanding of their material lack substance and overall depth in their field. As long as potential art teachers continue to be untrained and unqualified, the quality of public art education will remain elusive at best. A brighter future rests on the level of change that happens now. The quality of education is determined by how well our educators are prepared themselves. This notion of reform must start at the basis of the entire system, not only in the present classroom settings. If we can instill the pedagogy of ideas and innovation in the curriculum for teachers now, we can see a wave of change in the not so distant future.

CHAPTER 3

AND WHERE DOES THE KITTY LIVE

Ideas

The creation process can take on many different forms. Anyone can write a story about a hungry horse. But how would you draw this story without using words? Maybe you show the horse holding his stomach and dreaming about cake or sandwiches? Maybe you show him following another horse around who has a lot of food?

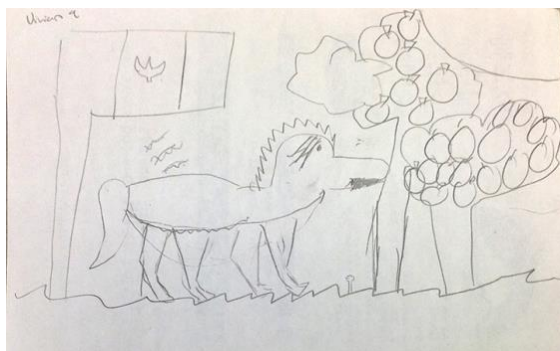


Figure 4 A Rumbling Tummy



Figure 5. A Salivating Horse and a Bowl of Apples

It is very easy to describe just how hungry the horse is using adjectives like: skinny, starving, rumbly, or verbs like: drooling or sniffing. But having to tell the whole story using only your drawings, is a completely different skill. How exactly would you show the difference between a fish that CAN fly and a fish that WANTS to fly?



Figure 6 "Can" and "Want"

Cecilia Conrad, professor of economics and dean of Pomona College in Claremont, California wrote of how our society discourages innovation in an article for the New York Times, “Creativity flourishes at the intersections of traditional disciplines, but traditional means of assessment often marginalize individuals working to define new and unique fields of endeavor. From the high-stakes tests in K-12, to the academic tenure clock, to the economy’s focus on short-term return on investments, American society’s reward structures tend to discourage unconventional thinking and limit risk-taking.” (Conrad, 2014) Genius thrives in an environment where children not only have the freedom to devote time and effort to ideas but are praised in doing so.

Most people are not aware of just how capable children are, especially their effortless ability to “think outside the boxes”, a concept that seems to dissipate with age. Their unique ideas and stories are then relegated to fuzzy notions of childhood ramblings about space monsters and talking bananas. These are missed opportunities to not only engage their minds but make them push themselves past their first inclinations and begin to dig deeper and think harder. They should be treated very much like adults with ground-braking ideas and also very much like professional artists. Where exactly are these space monsters from? Are they friendly or secretly plotting hostile takeover? If bananas could talk, what do you think they would ask for?

In Figure 7, Manny (8) creates a world where robots and monsters work together to perform various tasks that help the humans of this world in their everyday lives. He includes details like the textures that differentiate the monsters soft skin from the robots plated skin and items of food being served for lunchtime.



Figure 7. Robots and Monsters

Manny not only shows an advanced approach to art concepts like rendering and overlapping forms existing on one plane, he also shows a strong sense of design and vivacious storytelling. This is a perfect example of what confidence and strong guidance can do for a child's imagination. He did not achieve this level of ability from a mere practice in imitation of life. He was able to develop his creativity through his analysis and comprehension of the world around him.

Regurgitation Vs. Comprehension

The best way to teach is not through show and tell, but through a process of analyzing and comprehension. Most teachers start lesson plans with a gathering and telling of facts. The whole class observes as the teacher talks about a concrete concept like linear perspective or a famous artist and their corresponding movement, like Van Gogh and his Post-Impressionism style. They talk about important facts and dates and who went where and what they did. They might pick a key artist and show his life's work or the piece he is most famous for. Following this lecture, the kids then proceed to do their best imitation of the intended image for the lesson. Sometimes this image is a famous piece of artwork like Van Gogh's *Starry Night* or sometimes it's an example of a movement or a time in history like abstract art or the cave paintings from the Paleolithic Era.

The problem with this type of art lesson is in the lack of retention and comprehension. If the focus is purely on replicating brushstrokes or color schemes and memorizing facts, then originality is at a loss. If the only means of grading come from how close the kids are able to mimic something in front of them, when do they learn to have ideas and be themselves? The act of imposing traditional means of testing and grading onto an open, imaginative subject such as art, is to relegate its core intentions of improving free thinking to multiple choice test-taking.

Instead of making them memorize the cities where artists are born or what kind of yellow paint they used, we should be teaching them to think about where their ideas came from and why they felt the need to share them with the world through their art.

The problem with associating art with standardized testing is the key fact that these tests are in fact, standard. It is an assessment specifically constructed according to a set of testing standards indicated by the state or nation. It requires a teacher to administer and interpret the scores. Standardized tests are administered in the same way to all children, and all children are evaluated or scored using the same criteria. But not all children are created the same and they definitely do not learn the same way. This type of mentality does not create the right kind of environment for an art program, especially one that wholly depends on the confidence children have in themselves. In the March 2014 issue of *Young Children*, a web publication funded by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Stephanie Feeny, PhD, professor of education at the University of Hawaii writes of common problems she has witnessed in the over testing of young children. "In order to get children ready for higher academic expectations and the federally mandated third grade test, district administrators in Hawaii have decided that teachers will administer a standardized test of reading and math achievement to all kindergarten children in the district to demonstrate that they are making progress toward reaching the district's goals for what children know and are able to do." When she administered this test for the first time last year children started the task with enthusiasm, but as the test progressed they became restless and showed signs of discomfort. She observed behaviors that seemed to indicate that the testing situation was undermining children's confidence and that it was causing them unwarranted stress.

Furthermore the tests are not built on the grounds of indicating growth in knowledge. "Since test data are used for the purpose of demonstrating program accountability, the test does not provide information about what individual children have learned that could help to inform instruction in the classroom." (Feeny, 84-85) Not only do these types of tests limit children in their free-thinking abilities, they take up valuable classroom time and teacher resources where curriculum building should take lead.

What is the Story?

A well-planned art curriculum not only addresses the fundamental aspects of drawing, it allows for thinking, invention and most importantly, the contemplation of ideas. Why did this artist paint the things he did? What kinds of stories was he trying to tell? Why did he want to tell them? Good ideas do not grow on trees. They are birthed from miles and miles of thinking, laced with good solid brainwork. A good teacher does not show the students what to think; rather they teach them how to think.

A good teacher relies on their ability to ask the right questions to make the students think for themselves. They don't say things like, "Your kitties' ears are not pointy enough." This is a "tell" statement, where the teacher is telling the student what to do and the student needs to give no further input. A good teacher says things like "So where does this kitty live? Who takes care of him? What does this kitty like to eat?" These are "show" statements that ask the students to show more of their ideas and draw more of their story. Each of these questions made the student think more about their story and add more to their drawings. Instead of just giving away answers, good teachers make their students come up with their own.

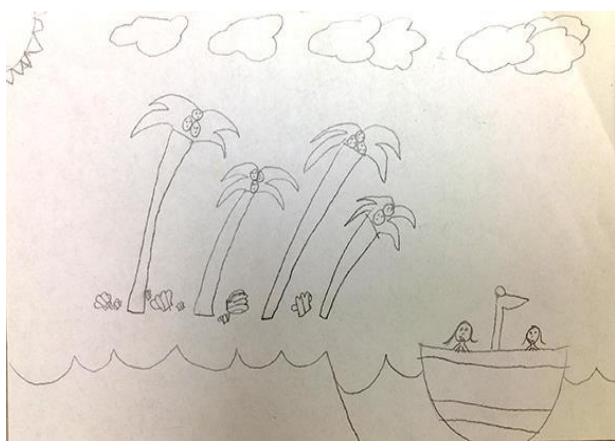


Figure 8. An Invisible Island

In Figure 8, Valerie (7) illustrates her response to the prompt, “Draw you, your friend, and an invisible island.” The key to this particular prompt is in each student’s ability to execute their interpretation of how to draw an island you can’t see. She accomplishes this by showing palm trees and seashells that seem to be floating in an empty space above a wave line that covers the island underwater.

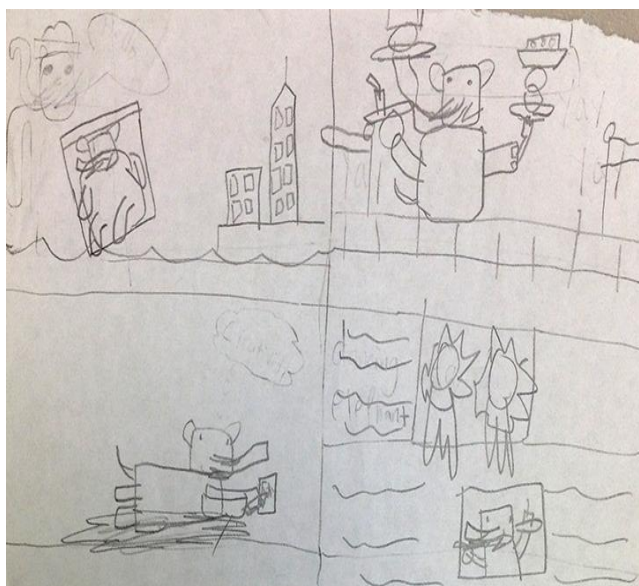


Figure 9. An Elephant That Can Talk

In Figure 9, Raymond (9) is given the prompt, “Draw a story about an elephant that can talk.” Once again the important part to focus on is how he is able to depict a talking elephant without writing words. His drawing shows a four part story where a talking elephant is discovered and transported overseas to a city where he is made to perform in a circus as the magical talking elephant. At night he is very lonely as he sleeps and tries to call his family. The last frame shows his friends the lions who come to rescue him and return him home. While the drawings may not show an advanced rendering technique, his story is clear and definitely shows his ideas.

When children start to think about the aspects of storytelling in their drawings instead of getting stuck in the idea that they have to draw everything as realistically as possible, then they really begin to focus on themselves and who they really are. The worse thing to teach them is that a cat has to be rendered perfectly and realistically otherwise it doesn’t look like a cat. This leads them to believe the false pretense that there is only one way to do everything when in actuality there are multiple answers to most questions.

In Figure 10, Jason (8) shows five different ways to use a chocolate spoon, including quieting a screaming baby and baiting a lion away from your car. Some may look at these illustrations and only see mistakes in form and technique but the real brilliance here is his invention of ideas. Allowing them to freely express themselves is the best way to encourage this type of invention.

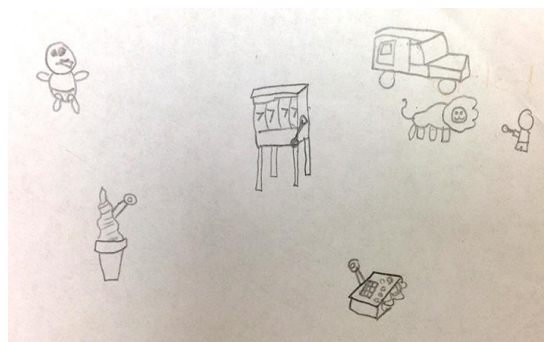


Figure 10. A Chocolate Spoon

No child is the same and there are many different types of personalities but the telltale signs of ones who have been put through the typical standard art program always stand out. Warm up exercises at the beginning of class are designed to get them to loosen up and draw more fluid, confident lines. Those who have been taught how to mimic art instead of produce it, usually display short, choppy sketch lines that wrap the contours of whatever they are drawing, which more often than not is simply an object they see around the classroom or a copy of a drawing another student has already done. These types of students have a hard time with the storytelling prompts that focus on drawing instead of writing words.

Inventors

Ultimately children are learning to draw from their imagination and how to think and approach ideas visually. Confident children who are bold with their stories and concepts have no hesitations when they are prompted to draw from their minds.

However, children who lack the belief in their own ideas, usually have a very hard time coming up with these drawings without the aide of something to copy. They draw slow, very small and tend to use their non-dominant hand to cover their work as they progress. This shows their lack of confidence in their own art.

On the other side of this, there are children who, when given free prompts to draw whatever they want resort to just regurgitating something they copied from before.

Usually some esoteric art concept like a three-dimensional cube or house. The problem here is they almost never actually comprehend what they are drawing. Yes the lines might be accurate but they lack true understanding. If they actually learned to draw the cube in 3D, they should be able to show what it looks like when it rotates in space. But since they have never been taught true understanding of the concept of form in space, they resort to just copying meaningless lines.

A lot can be learned from just watching their attempts. When they draw animals, are they remembering the characteristics that make each animal unique? When they draw people, is everyone standing on the same plane? Are the people simply stick figures? Did they add ears, noses, and eyebrows? (A commonly missed set of traits) How are they posed? Are they dynamic and engaging each other or are they standing in static positions? When they draw their house are they remembering specifics? Or is it simply square with a triangle roof?

Children see most things as symbols: a heart, a house, the sun, etc. Even though adults do not see objects the same way, they are the ones who implement their use. The symbol for a heart as we know it is nothing close to the beating muscle that powers our bodies. This shape actually started out as a representation of a fig leaf from the middle ages. A house is very rarely just a triangle on a square and the sun's rays do not look like a bunch of single lines. Ever since birth, adults have been unknowingly cementing these strange symbols in the minds of children and in turn, without question, that is what they know to be true. They do not learn to stop and ask themselves why all the trees they draw are apple trees.

When they learn to stop copying and start analyzing, they retain more information and become more enriched in their visual libraries. They stop and ask themselves questions and they search for the answers instead of having someone tell them what to do or what to copy. Repetitive motions of small scratchy lines do not teach children to analyze the entire object, rather it teaches their brains that all the information they need is a tiny one inch line, over and over again. It does not teach them to understand how an object looks, how a house is built, or how a human body works.

The action of drawing is little more than a mechanical skill that anyone can learn.

It is what you do with this skill that is important. Robert Henri says drawings are inventions and the best way to teach kids how to invent is by teaching them how to think.

The best way of doing that is by showing them how to analyze and comprehend what is in front of them. Most teachers think that only way for kids to learn to draw something is to look at an image of it and copy it. However this does nothing for their creative development.

Elliot Eisner, a professor of Art and Education at the Stanford Graduate School of Education wrote over 17 books and dozens of papers addressing art curriculum, pedagogy, aesthetic scanning, and qualitative measurement. He held many lectures throughout the nation and abroad on his profound ideas on art in the classroom. He believed, "To neglect the contribution of the arts in education, either through inadequate time, resources or poorly trained teachers, is to deny children access to one of the most stunning aspects of their culture and one of the most potent means for developing their minds," (Eisner, 58) Eisner was a forefront advocate for arts education particularly in the importance of introducing it at an early age. He credits arts for enriching and opening minds.

Eisner wrote, in his famous list of "10 Lessons the Arts Teach" that, besides being visually compelling, the arts help teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships and that problems can have more than one solution. Through the arts, they are able to experience the world through multiple perspectives and even help them say things that cannot be said. Overall he believed the arts to be absolutely integral in child development and comprehension is the key to this understanding.

Llama and Alpaca

The curriculum I created is designed around a process of understanding and recall. Particularly insightful is an exercise I call "Characteristic Drawing". As a class we pick a subject or keyword: an animal, a type of car, some kind of food, really anything.

Then as a class we look at a photo of this subject and discuss its characteristics for one minute. They are not allowed to draw during this minute. The focus is on looking and seeing. Doing it this way forces them to break down what they are looking at visually and verbally at the same time. I ask questions that are designed to help them

retain information. For example, what direction do an elephant's tusks grow? What shape are those horns on the top of a giraffe's head? How big is a rhino's eye compared to his nostril? After the quick discussion, they have five minutes to draw the subject on their own.

The key is it has to be in a different pose than the one previously pictured. This is crucial because they must actually use their brains and remember what the subject looks like as a whole, not just the outer contours they saw in the photo. This teaches them how to focus and retain information visually. They are never copying what they see. Instead they are learning to look, analyze and recall information on their own.

Figure 11 shows nine examples of a Characteristics study on reindeer. Each student retains their unique style and design while remembering the key traits of the



Figure 11. How to Reindeer

animal that make it unique. They each also include their own story that describe whereand what their reindeer might be doing.

The brain starts to make connections between what they see and how to interpret it in their minds, which then teaches them how to draw it with their hands. This connection is the best way to actually learn how to translate anything they see, not just copy one version of one thing. The goal is to not just "look" at something but to actually "see". They learn to analyze the information using words. Recalling what they learned immediately on their own will further cement the knowledge into their brains and stimulate the portions responsible for critical thinking.

This type of training also prepares them for advanced comparisons between different species. For example how does the feet on a tiger look compared to a cows? What distinguishes a seal from a sea lion? What exactly makes a llama different from an alpaca?

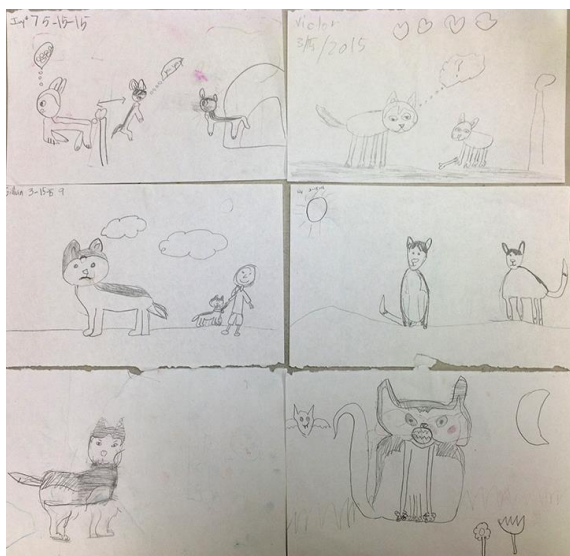


Figure 12. Characteristics of Huskies

How would you draw all the different breeds of dogs as opposed to just a generic "dog"? Figure 12 shows an example of student's studies of huskies with key characteristics. They are now focused on the specific traits of the breed instead of a generalized concept of dogs.

Instead of copying the contours of an object, they learn to analyze it visually and then turn the object in space. This is the true test of understanding how to draw. Can they turn rotate the object in their heads or are they just repeating lines they have drawn before? The goal is for true retention of knowledge, not mindless regurgitation.

Brainstorming



Figure 13. Idea Maps for "Animal Stacks"

Art should always open the mind to create and invent. Lessons should have an element of finding that creativity and push them to have ideas independent of class involvement. My projects always start with brainstorming or "idea mapping". It is the best way to organize thoughts and clear the mind from the constraints of any predisposed notion of what "art" is. Instead, the focus is on letting the ideas flow freely. Sometimes giving kids a big empty page and telling them to just start drawing can be intimidating. By breaking it down into steps, it helps designate time for open thinking.



Figure 14. "Animal Stacks" Final Projects

Allowing time for only thinking is essentially unclogging the brain of self-doubt and hesitation. Imagine sitting in a lecture and taking speedy notes on a computer. You are typing and typing and you make a mistake. Now you have to move the cursor back and fix it. You were on a roll in your mind and now you are backtracking through your thoughts. Every time you have to stop to correct a mistake, you essentially have to restart.

From the December, 2007 issue of *Harvard Business Review*, Kevin Coyne speaks on the importance of allowing the free flow of ideas during brainstorming. "When you ask questions that create new boxes to think inside, you can prevent people from getting lost in the cosmos and give them a basis for making and comparing choices and for knowing whether they're making progress. How you organize and conduct brainstorming sessions also matters enormously. You must redesign your ideation processes so that they remove obstacles that interfere with the flow of ideas" (Coyne) When you brainstorm, you are doing warm-up stretches. You are pushing past the obvious things, the first ideas, and delving deeper into your thoughts.

Often the first ideas are the most simple, basic ones. But if you keep going past the fourth, the fifth, the tenth idea, that is when true genius starts to flourish. For example, can you think of one way we eat strawberries? Of course you can. What about three ways? What about ten? The more you push your mind, the deeper your thinking evolves. Creativity is a muscle, and like all others, needs to be stretched and used. Left untouched, it will start to get stiff and atrophy.

If everyone only stuck to their first ideas, the world would be a very different place. Jack Foster, Creative Director and author of *How to Get Ideas*, teaches a three-day seminar on advertising in Chicago. One of the assignments he gives is to create, overnight, an outdoor board for a Swiss Army Knife. Several of the students would say that they worked for hours and could not come up with anything. This happened three years in a row. Then the fourth year he tried something different.

Instead of asking for just one billboard, he asked each student to create at least ten. And instead of giving them all night, they had to do it during their lunch hour.

Amazingly, after lunch everybody had at least ten ideas. Many had more and one student had twenty-five. Foster realized that when faced with a problem, "Most people look for the one right solution because that is the way they were taught to answer multiple choice and true or false questions, questions that had only one right answer. They assume all problems are like that and when they cannot find an answer that looks perfect, they give up. But most problems have many and once students realize this, they begin to find all those solutions." (Foster, 36) The key to creation and making something new, is to first allow the mind to consider all the possibilities, then ask the right questions to push past the easy ones.

Being in an environment that is conducive to thinking and asking questions instead of just copying and memorizing, helps to keep all the brain cells firing and most importantly promotes growth. The ultimate goal is more than just making marks but growing the mind. If students can learn to convey all their thoughts on paper, and feel they are successful in telling their stories, the start to gain confidence in themselves and their original ideas.

In my curriculum, a big part of classis visual storytelling and learning to draw instead of write your ideas.

It is much easier to describe a house using words or write a paragraph about a perfect day. To illustrate these ideas takes much more brainpower on a different level. Figure 15 is an example of a homework assignment where student were to draw, “A 100 year old panda has lost all of his teeth! How can he make bamboo easier to chew? How do you show him he is 100 years old?” The challenge here is not only to depict an aging panda, but show how you would be able to make him see that he is now in his senior years. Jane drew her panda with wrinkles and leaning onto a stalk of bamboo while she shows herself presenting him with a walking cane. She also drew a truck in the background that is delivering a fresh order of “Bamboo Bread” that makes it easier to for the panda to eat.

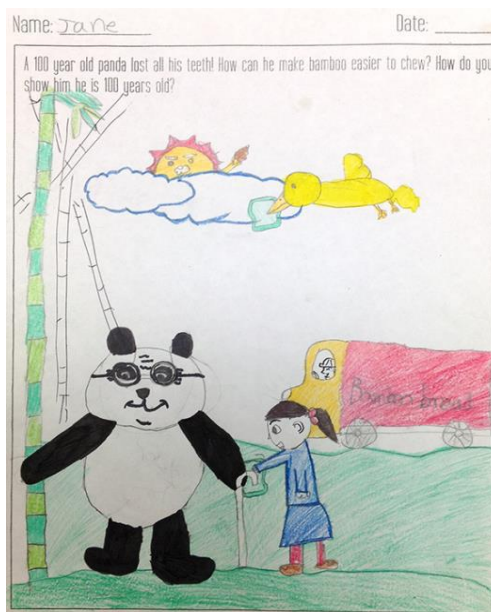


Figure 15. 100 Year Old Panda

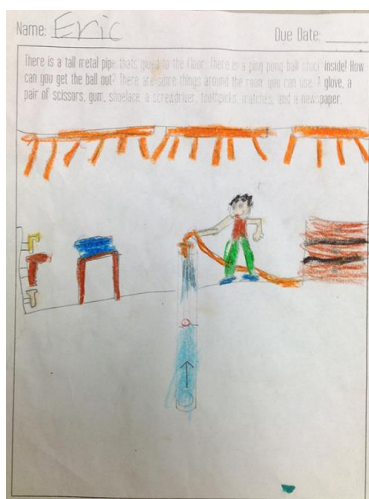


Figure 16. Ping Pong Ball

A student can write that one day he woke up feeling nervous for his talent show and had to eat ten pancakes to calm down. He can accomplish this using just a few sentences. But in order to convey the same story with no words requires visual problem-solving of a much higher level. He cannot simply draw a person standing over some pancakes. He needs to describe the mood and tone of how the he feels when he wakes up. Furthermore he needs to figure out how to show that he just woke up as opposed to just getting ready to sleep. When children learn how to do this, they allow themselves the freedom to come up with ideas because the execution of them becomes effortless.

Problem-solving prompts prove the most effective at encouraging a wealth of different interpretations from students. In Figure 16, the prompt states, “There is a tall metal pipe that is glued to the floor. There is a ping-pong ball stuck inside! How can you get the ball out? There are some things around the room you can use: A glove, a pair of scissors, gum, shoelace, a screwdriver, toothpicks, matches, and a newspaper.” Even though there is an extensive list of objects here, there is actually a hidden answer that is the most effective and also the simplest. Eric (6) one of the youngest in class was also the first to get this answer: Pour water in the pipe! While adults might labor away trying to build the

perfect device with the objects listed, they might fail to see past the distractions to find the path of least resistance.

Problem-solving might seem like an adult task but children often surpass them in execution simply because of their ability to be open-minded. Figure 17 is a perfect example of a simple solution to a seemingly complex problem. “You and your neighbor are fighting because his giant chicken is eating your plants. How do you solve the problem without hurting your neighbor or the chicken? How do you make everyone happy? And you can’t move away!” Jonathon (7) drew himself taking a healthy dose of seeds over to his neighbor’s house and planting a large batch of crops for his giant chickens to eat. His smart solution meets all of the requirements and the chickens do indeed seem quite happy.

Humans characteristically are drawn to riddles and puzzles and this instinct is first

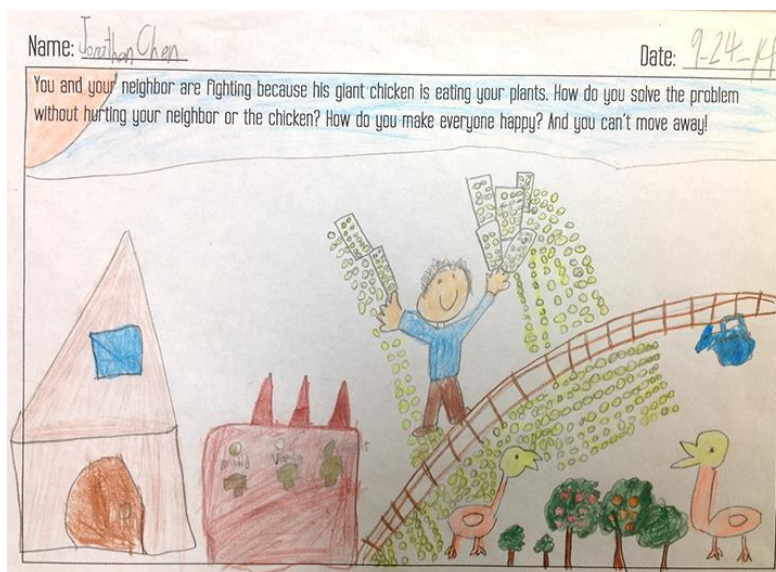


Figure 17. A Chicken Problem

hand in children. As educators, we should do everything in our ability to present them with puzzles to solve. An octopus has lost all of his tentacles! What can you give him to help him swim? Is he stronger now or weaker? A king and queen are looking for their secret treasure in a deep dark cave. But the treasure is something that is only valuable to them and no one else. What is it? What would happen if rain rose from the ground instead of falling from the sky? There is a wizard who wants to ask you a very important question! What does he ask for?

Homework should be more than just more of the same. Homework is the perfect setting to reinforce and practice the skills they learned in class but do it on their own without the aid of a teacher. Kids who take art classes should be capable of reproducing what they do in class at home. Any teacher can draw on a child's work during class and produce a good finished product, but those kids will not be able to recreate the same level of work at home. That is a failure of the art teacher.

But when kids learn how to draw from their minds, they can take their skills with them wherever they go. Instead of photos to copy or a teacher to draw over their work, they require nothing more than their brains and a pencil.

CHAPTER 4

IT IS ROCKET SCIENCE

The Future State

When it comes to action in education reformation there is never a more perfect time than the present. In order to properly address these monumental concerns regarding curriculum, there needs to be a change starting at the root of the problem in teacher training. General Colin L. Powell, the Founding Chair for America's Promise Alliance, a foundation started in 1997 to help children and youth from all socioeconomic sectors in the United States believes in the power of youth in this country above all else. "The most powerful innovation contributing to students' success is support from caring adults in schools. Young people told us they need an anchor, someone whom they can trust to be a stable presence in their lives." (Powell) Teachers have the potential to affect change for many generations ahead and hold the key to influencing growth. They have to be a respected voice at the center of change.

As a nation we must properly prepare our teachers for their careers ahead. We must start the change before they complete their degree programs and become credentialed instructors of the state. If we believe that children are indeed our future, we need to start preparing those who will train them now. If the standards for art pedagogy in the public school system do not change, there is very hope that future generations will possess the creative skills that will carry them through real world problems. As a state there must be better means of accountability to attest to the amount of knowledge we teach our children to retain. And it needs to be more than proving an ability to circle the right box on a test.

In 2001, the Board of Education set standards at each grade level for what students should know and be able to do in music, visual arts, theater, and dance, but a statewide study done in 2006 found that 89 percent of K-12 schools failed to offer a course of study in all four disciplines. Sixty-one percent of schools didn't even have a full-time arts specialist. Fran Smith is a longtime contributing editor of Edutopia, a comprehensive website and online community that increases knowledge, sharing and adoption of what works in K-12 education. She states, "In many districts, the arts have suffered for so long that it will take years, and massive investment, to turn things around. But some districts have made great strides toward not only revitalizing the arts but also using them to reinvent schools." (Smith) Change like this takes leadership, innovation, partnerships, and relentless insistence that the arts are central to what we want students to learn.

We take things like education for granted when we do not feel the immediate effects on a daily basis. Part of the problem with art classes is the idea that art is easy and can be measured on a daily basis. When in fact, art is more than an accumulation of time spent. For kids to learn in a natural holistic way, we must support their efforts in their learning process and not put all the focus on the end results. Art is a place where learning becomes self motivated and as educators we must teach them to first believe in what they have to say.

There is no definitive test or standard that can be forced upon every student. There is no panacea for encouraging creativity. There is not a perfect lesson plan template to follow 100% of the time. When it comes to the mind of the very young and gifted, the best we can do is let them be themselves and guide them to improve and find the better versions of the people they already are. They are more than formulas and equations. Their individuality is worth far more than the measure of their collective conformity. If only there were an easy switch or a bubble to circle. But when it comes to the state of our future, it really is rocket science.

Two Kinds of Kids

There are definitely more than two kinds of children but generally there are type one kids who are confident in

themselves and type two who are simply not. Kids who are encouraged to revel in their own wonders learn to grow up with a mind that is open to the possibilities beyond what they perceive in front of them. The world for them is more than facts and tests. There is room for originality and innovation. These are the ones who care about their work and show this care in the quality of their efforts. They learn to work independently and to self-critique as opposed to waiting for someone to give them “tell” statements. These kids do not care if their skies are blue or what brand of paint to use. They strive for excellence because they have been shown they are capable of it. They push past their first ideas.

Type two children are less likely to reach this level of clarity in thoughts and opinions. They were molded to believe there is only one right way to do everything. Because they have been conditioned to rely on outside influence, they approach real life problems with the same mindset. They wait for the “tells”. They build the Lego sets that come with instructions. They take longer to make up their minds and then question their decisions. They hesitate and they erase. They do not feed their horse.

These students graduate high school and college but then fall into the sinking ship of adults with degrees but are undesired in the workplace because of their lack of confidence in decision making. As a boss no one wants to hire someone they cannot trust to think for themselves. That would require them to almost work twice as hard and do two times the amount of thinking and accomplish half as much. These students tend to redo what they or other people did the last time.

Confident children do not rely on their last time. To them every time is a first time. When searching for solutions they are able to discover new concepts that seem to break the constraints of the average adult brain. They break rules because they do not yet know they exist. They constantly see new relationships among seemingly unrelated things. Confident children grow into exceptional adults and ultimately educators are responsible for these adults of the future. They work well in groups. They share and encourage growth of others as well as themselves. They are always thinking. They look for the answers but are not afraid of discovering questions in the process. They know to first seek the answers in themselves and not rely on others to do the work for them. Their Lego sets are mixed together and they never build the same thing twice. They are the bold, independent idea-havers who we build our futures on.

Feeding the Horse

When we are presented with a hungry horse, the best way to feed him is to teach him how to feed himself. If the goal is truly to motivate these young minds, they should be taught how to appreciate their own opinions. When we are given the chance to do the same for children our initial reaction might be to just give them what they want. But when children get all the apples they could ever want (or cookies), what is left to desire?

By catering their minds with answers, they will in fact always remain hungry for questions.

The measure of a good teacher lies in how much their students learn. Their ability to teach and inspire young minds will shape the way they think through their adult lives. How much information students retain are a direct result of their teachers capabilities in the classroom. Years later, it is the knowledge that remains. The ideas and the stories they create will not be left behind or replaced by summer camps and lazy Sundays.

Problems in education cannot be masked by arbitrary standards and grading rubrics. We should create change and reform based on the core principles of creativity. The emphasis on reality does not advance their ability to think. The focus needs to be placed on growth instead of trying to compensate for a lack of strong foundations. Baudelaire described “genius” as childhood recovered at will. A child is unrestrained by the sheer logic adults attribute to the world. They do not know what they cannot or should not do. They see the world as it actually is, not the way adults have been taught to believe that it is. As children they are far more capable than what’s credited to them. They seek knowledge, encouragement, and the freedom to pursue their own ideas. We should remind them of their endless capabilities and push them to surpass the standards of the state. As young artists they strive to stand out and become creators. As educators we simply need to let them.

APPENDIX A

LESSON PLAN GUIDE: CHARACTERISTIC DRAWING

Nicole Yang

Target Grade Level: 4th Time Needed: 15 minutes

Supplies Needed: Paper and pencils

Preparation: 2-3 Images of keyword (full view and close-up)

Keyword: Elephant

Procedure:

1. Start by reviewing the definition of the word “characteristics” with the class. Ask if anyone already knows and encourage open forum responses. You’re looking for the words: special, traits, features, unique, different, etc. (1 – 2 minutes)
2. Announce the keyword to the class and ask them to describe the characteristics as they know them to be. (1 minute)
3. Show the full view image and ask the class to participate in an open discussion about the special characteristics of the keyword. Take note to lead them with specific questions that are meant to make them take notice of specific things. (1- 2 minutes)

Examples:

- a) How big is the size of the elephants head compared to the body?
- b) What kind of textures do you see on the elephants skin?
- c) What does the tail look like?

Then show them the close-up view and ask more questions. (1 – 2 minutes) Examples:

- d) Where do the ears protrude from the head?
- e) Where do the tusks grow from?

1. Take all the photos away and give them all 5 minutes to draw their own elephant. Stress that it must be in a different pose than the full view photo they saw and they must include the whole body as well as a background. Ask them to think about where the elephant is and what it is doing. (5 minutes)

Let them work on their own for the first two minutes then begin to reiterate some of the things that were discussed by asking the same questions.

Example:

“Remember the different kinds of textures and what the tail looks like”

2. Review the images together as a class (hang them all up on a whiteboard if possible) and point out students who really exemplified the key points of the discussion as well as students who made extra effort to include a backstory for the elephant. (remaining time)

Bonus Step: if time allows, let the class trade drawings with their neighbor and give them all an additional minute to add finishing touches to their neighbor’s drawings without erasing their original line work. (1 minute)

APPENDIX B

LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE: BRAINSTORMING

Project: (Name of project here)		Brainstorm: (Topic of brainstorming)	

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There is currently a group of 60-ish tiny adults with bright, shiny minds that I owe everything to. Them, and the hundreds of other children that have passed through my classroom doors have taught me more about the world and myself than any standardize tests ever have. To them I say, "Stay young, stay free. Always feed your horse."