Initial Philosophy Revised

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How do teachers understand and apply essential skills, central concepts and tools of inquiry in their subject matter or field?

The common core can have an undesired effect on art education because implementing it and measuring its impact tends to be data driven and factual. There is little room for the sometimes arbitrary nature of the arts. A group of educators conducted research on implementing the common core in city schools to provide a framework for using a multi tiered system of support. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports is designed so that schools can provide the appropriate level of instruction and intervention for their students. (Gamm et. al.) So, as part of my curriculum, I bring Mathematics, reading and writing into my lessons wherever I can. I attempt to demonstrate proficiency in reading and writing by having my students keep a Developmental Workbook. Every day they write a journal entry. They do planning before a project, self reflections during, and a summary at the end. When I can I teach lessons that relate to math. Geometry, measuring, and proportions are three areas I do this.

I incorporate all of the CT State Standards and as much of the common core as I can into each lesson. These connections are posted on my board for each lesson. But the resulting changes to the expectations of arts educators can be profound. The Arts Education partnership offers a wide range of resources to promote it.
I use a smart board to project examples, and give each student a printed summary of each lesson as well as giving a verbal lecture and physical demonstration. Then I reinforce by working individually with each kids as time permits.

As a digitally minded teacher, I use technology to connect to other teachers and enhance my student's learning. My sixth graders are making blogs and will be connecting to students in Turkey through (Epals).

We use content area literacy skills by conducting research on each subject and sharing it in class. Each student writes a brief investigation on each subject, then take turns standing in front of the group and sharing bits of what they found. We will also spend time reading as a group and evaluating information. Finally we conduct class critiques where students discuss each other work and compare them to professional examples.

As part of my course, each lesson involves a level of problem solving. I teach open ended art lessons that require the students to make creative choices. Each project is challenging, and the results are specifically tailored to each student. Each student has to analyze what they have done compared to an example and make changes where needed as they work.

In my opinion it is not enough for teachers to embrace the common core and work it into arts education. It has to be administrators who actively want, and take action to, increase arts education. So what can
administrators do to assist art? I found a 2011 PDF that outlines several ideas: (Aprill)

A. Establish a school wide commitment to arts learning. I think this is hugely important. In my particular school, art has become the subject that doesn't matter. It seems that in every class I have to engage students in the "why does art matter" discussion. By articulating clear goals, making room for art in the budget, exploring multiple approaches, making arts learning visible and engaging parents this can be accomplished. Administrators have a choice in this! “The vision starts at the top. I have a vision for what children need. Middle school is the place where we prepare children for adulthood, and they need more than reading and math. The arts bring children together.” Debra Garofolo, Principal. For administrators to drastically cut the arts, then simply throw up their hands and say they have no choice, cannot happen. They have to do better!

The next part of the PDF talks about creating an arts-rich learning environment. One of the bullet points is bringing art into daily classroom instruction. It is a small nudge, but I see this as the opposite of the question at hand. How can teachers apply essential skills in their field to support the common core? The arts have to be brought into the common core, not made to support it. The arts have to be part of it. The arts should not exist to support the common core. They should be looked at as mutually integrated subjects. “The object of education, rightly understood is, first to make good men ...secondly to fit them for usefulness.” –
Egerton Ryerson (Doughty) While Doughty goes as far as to say that the liberal arts, including Art Education, are vital to the future of our species, I would settle for important for a well rounded individual.
How do teachers promote student engagement, independence and interdependence in learning by facilitating a positive learning community?

I attempt to create a balanced, positive learning environment in my room. I display as much student work as possible to help give students ownership of the space. I display instructions on different walls so that all students have equal access and I also give each student a written summary of instructions. Student's seats are rearranged every marking period.

My students keep a developmental workbook which is a summary of their process. Part of this work is a daily self evaluation where students reflect upon their work and find ways to improve it. This process helps them take responsibility for their own learning.

I keep a list of expectations on the board that demonstrate in a positive way how they are expected to behave. My list offers proactive options such as "Use Proper Language" rather than "No Swearing".

I continually reinforce appropriate levels of behavior. I use positive reinforcement where needed and make a point to reward students for exhibiting appropriate behavior more than reprimanding those who do not. I conduct a lesson about respect and its meaning. It is clear to me that a student's understanding of what proper respect is could very widely from that of my own. So it is necessary to establish its meaning with every individual class.
An art class works best with strict routine. I maximize learning time by establishing a fixed set of routines and procedures. I preset the required materials and frequently demonstrate their use and cleanup. I keep a countdown during each class letting them know how much time they have to work, and remind them of levels of progress. When students arrive there is a "do now" on the board with instructions for them to get started while we are waiting for all students to come in and at the end of class they write a journal entry after cleanup.

One of the major challenges I see in balancing my art room is it’s perceived value in the school. Lisa Lajevic conducted research on Arts Integration and arrived at the same conclusion. The arts are often devalued. Not only are the arts used for decorative purposes, but the arts component in Arts Integration is greatly diluted as well. Addressing what can be done to attend to the problem of devaluing the arts in the classroom, this essay holds implications for teacher education, Arts Integration and curriculum development. (LaJevic)

According to Lajevic, her experience has been that general education teachers lack a general knowledge about the arts and an understanding of the relationship between art and learning, in particular, Arts Integration. This repeats itself in school after school. It is my experience that many teachers perceive what I do as simply coloring with the kids. They don’t understand that the nature of Art class IS to balance subjects like math. But more than that, art teachers promote engagement
on a higher level than what you may find in a math class. Many students learn better by being engaged with their hands. And even more than that, in my classroom I engage the students in ideas. Creative thinking is a skill that so many students, and adults alike lack, and it is one that is so valuable in math and other core classes as well. So I focus my classroom on not just independence, but interdependence in learning. Students learn on their own, and with each other. I strive to have no two student's art projects look alike. The best way for this to happen is to have them engage each other, and figure out for themselves how to avoid the problem.
How do teachers plan instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large?

Some things, such as prior knowledge in art, are very important. Based on the Stamford Public Schools curriculum for the arts I have an understanding of what each kid should know coming into my classroom. However, it is my experience that I need to be more thorough than that. So I administer a basic evaluation at the start of 6th grade to gauge their level of knowledge.

Based on the curriculum plan I develop lessons that progress and advance their development. I build units that take them in learning arches over the course of 2 or 3 major lessons. My lessons each focus on a direct concept that is just a part of a major whole. Each lesson works with a specific aspect of art history and one or two skills based on the elements of art.

Each lesson I teach is accessed via rubrics tailored to measure performance specific to the individual skills. Research suggest that rubrics may be a useful tool for measuring the impact of arts integration, facilitating teacher planning, supporting collaboration between artists and educators, and helping students conduct self-assessments. (Mason, Steely 2006) But more important, I deliver assignments that can be open ended which allow students to grow and critically analyze their work, and change it if necessary.
I also connect my learning activities to real world situations and global minded thinking. As part of this, I collaborate with other disciplines whenever possible, especially social studies. I time my units to be delivered while related content is being taught in other classes. An interesting article actually adds an A for Art to the STEM acronym which stand for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. It focuses on where art intersects with these four core classes and how to best use the arts to promote learning! (Wynn, Harris)

As part of my instruction I include direct application of literacy skills and numeracy. My students are required to self reflect and keep journals that begin in 6th grade and carry over until the end of 8th. This Process Journal will help them summarize how they have grown as learners and writers.

One new program being implemented in my school is called Learning to Look. In this program professionals in the field will enter the classroom and discuss their art, and art history. In this process, kids will respond to art work, and how it relates to traditional pieces from history. This also connects to their journal process because they will write about their experience and express their thoughts through written word. The program includes trips to museums where students then search for the art works discussed in the programs and give their live impressions. This is an outstanding method of promoting their curiosity in the world at large. It is one thing to look at photographs online of art work, but an entirely different experience to see the physical pieces in front of you. Learning to look gives students the tools they need to do this properly, to critically
view art, and thoroughly write about it. In my experience, this is a sorely lacking skill.

This is similar in practice to a theory discussed by Kathleen Oconnel King in her paper on promoting student literacy through the use of Young Adult Literature. She offers that rather than teachers attempting to teach from the classics first, they should use Young Adult Literature first to make connections, then relate them to the classics. (King) This is a very similar approach to Learning to Look.
How do teachers implement instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large?

Understanding how society, and the world affect our schools, lives and education is important. Over the course of American history it is clear that society has changed the schools, at the same time that schools have exerted a telling influence on the shape of social change. (Rury) It is important to not only understand such changes on a global level as well as local. This understand comes not only from knowing what is going on in the world, but perhaps more importantly, understanding what is going on in their own minds. Students need to have the ability to change with a changing world. I encourage my students to actively and critically evaluate my projects and if need be change them to their own needs. I deliver lessons via a smart board showing a variety of different historical and cultural elements that relate to my instruction. We hold prediscussions about the topics, and critique our work at the end where I engage the students, and they engage each other, in critical discussion and analysis. During this process, I encourage my students to become the teacher and help each other understand the concept. My students present short research assignments to the class. This is important because it presents the content in "kid speak" which they can relate to, and it also helps them look at the content from perspectives other than my own.
Art instruction easily lends itself to differentiation to accommodate students with different learning needs. I present to the class as a whole, then individually am able work with students who require further instruction. I present the content in multiple ways on the smart board, verbally and through physical handouts. I also vary the way content is delivered such as check point lists or powerpoint presentations for example. This process allows me to adjust my instruction as needed for each student. Throughout their projects I provide meaningful feedback to help them more fully understand the topic and how they can improve their work.

_Taking charge in the classroom and teaching a lesson to one's peers offers a greater deal of control and ownership for the students._ Freire _discusses achieving critical consciousness of the fact that it is necessary to be the owner of one's own labor. That labor constitutes part of being human and that a human being can neither be sold nor can he sell himself._ (Freire). _So, taking part in teaching their own class helps to humanize the students, and the teachers, thus making the connection stronger and helping students to gain a more thorough understanding._ Understanding _society and culture gives the individual the power they need to rise from oppression, and the constraints of society, and stand on their own._
How do teachers use multiple measures to analyze student performance and to inform subsequent planning and instruction?

Assessment in the arts is perhaps one of the most challenging factors of the discipline. How do we fairly assess each individual student on something that is difficult to measure quantitatively? First I focus on Blooms higher and lower order skills Remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. (Luebke 2013) These each have sub sections in my student's Journals as they are also part of my schools IB program. A simple check is to read the journal for understanding in each of the categories and compare that to the required elements of instruction. But in addition I create project specific rubrics to help students understand what they are required to complete in order to attain maximum credit. I frequently collaborate with my colleagues during PLCs to review our assessment procedures.

As part of assessing the journals and class projects I will provide each student with written feedback both in the journal and on a rubric handout and meet with each student to discuss how they could do better based on that rubric. I will also work closely with the special education teachers to understand the data and design more individualized assignments that meet their various needs.

With so much emphasis on the common core and the arts, more specifically integrating the arts into the common core, it is refreshing to know that some states value the arts as part of the core. A 2008 California arts assessment resource guide had this to say for its mission statement.
"The visual and performing arts are an integral part of a comprehensive curriculum and are essential for learning in the 21st century. All California students from every culture, geographic region and socio-economic level--deserve quality arts learning in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts as part of the core curriculum." (Anderberg) But what does this mean? Are the arts on par with math and science as core classes? This is the ever waging battle for survival for the arts, at least in middle and elementary schools.

Assessing art is unique. “Doing” and “making” are critical components of arts education. Arts knowledge is assessable and so is the process of making art as well as the artwork itself. Each of these components – knowledge, process and production – is intertwined, and each needs to be represented and accounted for in the assessment system. (Anderberg) The importance of self assessment is a big part of the publication and I couldn’t agree more.

A quick area of concern that needs to be addressed is how "art" is defined, and more specifically, what art is taught. A list of criteria was offered by Lynne Munson. Essentially she says that selecting which art to teach is as important as selecting which text to use. One of the criteria was that art should be "art" not "illustration". (Munson) It is important that any policy made in creating such definitions be done by art educators.
How do teachers maximize support for student learning by developing and demonstrating professionalism, collaboration with others, and leadership?

I work with many other teachers in my school to coordinate instruction and collaborate with curriculum. I meet with my colleagues to plan a consistent yet varied program of instruction. As an IB teacher, I seek out professional development and training sessions. This year I went to St. Louis for a teacher conference. As part of our PLCs we discuss student achievement to help support the School Improvement Plan. I work with the paraprofessionals in my room to help improve the instruction for those students in need, and also communicate frequently with administration, seeking support when needed for behavioral and instructional intervention. *The Common Core encourages cooperation as well as integration. I found a wonderful site by the Arts Education Partnership that discusses the impacts that the common core can have. "They have resulted in many changes. The resulting changes to the expectations of arts educators can be profound. AEP is providing this (ever-growing) selection of resources to help AEP Partner Organizations, arts educators, school leaders, and policymakers develop a better understanding of the Common Core and what the movement means for the arts."* (Common Core and the Arts)
When I make contact with parents, I first meet with guidance and social workers to gain insight into the student's needs and to be sure I am being sensitive to cultural differences. I will ask teachers who speak appropriate languages to assist with translation when necessary. I always use communication technology in a professional and ethical manner. I do not use student names in emails and won't give specific details when information is better presented, and understood in a face to face conversation.

It is important to understand student's legal rights and I thoroughly familiarize myself with each IEP document. I constantly seek out support and insight into cultural differences and how those differences affect behavior and learning. One particular book, Other People's Children by Lisa Delpit (1995) was extremely useful in gaining insight into black male culture and understanding decision making, thus allowing me to properly respond to individual situations.

Part of my collaboration with colleagues is to understand each student's individual needs, and to assist in making plans for the future, both near and far. I identify students who may excel in art for example, and help them gain access to the proper classes and teachers in high school and beyond.

But beyond just collaborating to improve learning, sometimes working with fellow art teachers results in the creation of art! We find inspiration in each other and apply that finding to our classrooms.

In order for the arts to continue it is extremely important that we evolve to incorporate the common core standards into our teaching. But not only that, we
need to demonstrate this incorporation by showing its value. We need to work together with core teachers to show that we support the core. We need to work with special education teachers to tailor our teaching to each individual student's need. And we need to communicate with parents professionally and efficiently to create a teaching team. It is my philosophy that art needs to become so much more than what it traditionally is to remain important and grow.

Working together across disciplines is important for art to grow within the common core. An important cross collaborative area is social studies since it is related to art and often times units intersect naturally. David Coleman, one of the authors of the common core state standards, offers a paper with seven guiding principles for the arts in relation to the common core. One of them discusses the Studying the social, political, cultural and economic contexts of works of arts while maintaining an in depth focus on each work, allowing students deeper understanding of the works of art that includes their connections with other areas of knowledge and in the evolution of the art disciplines. (Coleman) Political, cultural and economic contexts can be applied across both disciplines to greater enhance learning.
References


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