



Why Does Art Education Matter?

An Introductory Guide



ACCESS TO ARTS

















Everyone, Everyday, Everywhere



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WHY DOES ART EDUCATION MATTER?

Culture for Kids in the Arts: Our Community



What is ARTASIA?

ARTASIA is Culture for Kids in the Arts summer program. It is a multi-faceted city-wide visual arts project that officially began in 2010 and takes place in Hamilton Ontario. It involves 5 pillars: art, education, environmentalism, civic engagement and innovation, and 3 principles: children's voices, seeing potential and imagination. ARTASIA is based on the belief that creativity is important to development, and that the visions and ideas of children have the right to be seen and heard, and are vital to healthy communities. We reach approximately 500 children annually, and we share their work in multiple ways, including a large-scale art exhibition that takes place at the end of August and travels throughout the year. Artasia partners with the Boys and Girls Club, Today's Family, YMCA and Wesley Urban Ministries and the City of Hamilton Neighbourhood Development office (Central Memorial Recreation Center), to bring art education to children ages 6 – 12, from all backgrounds at various locations across the city.





Artistic Director's Vision



Escaping 90:10

Vitek Wincza

I have always been concerned with the fact that when funding is limited, the arts are the first thing that is cut within the education system. The arts are vital to the development of every child, and can bring children together, particularly in a country and city where we welcome people from all over the world. Why is there a stereotype that the arts are simply a playground for the rich, and not important for all children to access? There is enough evidence that the arts have a positive effect, and can improve focus and discipline and develop a deeper relationship with learning, regardless of the subject. Education should be based on creativity first. Rote learning, or memory based learning has little meaning if you don't know how to put what you learn to use in the real world, or celebrate it within an everyday context. The arts cannot be only about memorization, though there are certainly moments where memory has a role. The arts enable learning through embodied experiences. They come about by doing.

The situation of the arts is very different compared to sports. The arts are not as accessible to the general population as sports are, both in terms of participating and watching. How can it be that so many scholars have studied the arts, and demonstrated left and right that exposure to the arts, and art making have all kinds of positive effects (Greene, Eisner, etc...), and yet the arts are not valued or even properly integrated in schools, or accessible to all children and youth?

At Culture for Kids in the Arts (CKA) and the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts (HCA) we have an A,B,C concept. "A" is the introduction, whether it be to a lesson, or a project. "B" is development, and "C" represents celebration. The arts always bring with them opportunities for celebration... to celebrate what we have learned and accomplished together, whether it be in the form of an exhibition or performance, we celebrate! We celebrate our accomplishments by sharing them with the community. Our accomplishments run much deeper than mere memorization. Through the arts we use and apply knowledge on all levels.... this includes more instinctive and emotional types of knowing, and reflecting. Intelligence comes in many forms.

Our goal is for the arts to become everyday, everywhere, for everybody. How can we do this? We started analyzing the places where kids generally go: the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Today's Family: our partners in the community. We noticed that generally speaking the arts are treated as something "rare and special". This means they are reserved for times when there happens to be extra money, and an organization can decide to provide a hip hop class or what not. However, when the hip hop class is finished, that tends to be it for another six months, or until there happens to be more money again. When budgets are tight, there are no arts at all, and this is reflected in schools as well. This gesture in itself is clear evidence of the level of value we place on the arts.

So how can we make the arts a sustainable part of learning, and a real partner for everyone, everywhere, everyday, so that it becomes a natural part of who we are, as opposed to something "special"? The arts should simply be a part of the everyday learning process. In other words, you don't have to put on a bow tie and go to the gallery. The arts should surround us in our everyday life. It is a part of who we are, and should be a regular part of our lives, rather than placed on reserve for once or twice a year. When we looked a little more closely at how recreation centres generally operate, what worried us was that when our arts instructors would come to a site, the staff on site would disengage from the arts activities, often by literally taking a break or leaving. The first issue then is, through no fault of their own, they were not

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Artistic Director's Vision



eager to participate, and often quite shy about it.

This is a confidence issue based on their own inexperience with the arts throughout school and life. If you haven't had much exposure in your own life, how could you be expected to feel comfortable in what has become almost a foreign situation? The perception is that art education is a highly specialized situation, so people often think, for example, there is no way I could teach children how to sing, or play the piano, or dance, or paint, because I've never even done any of these things myself. They tend to stay away because they lack confidence. The children of course sense this hesitation, and it is as contagious as the common cold. Although children are naturally quite eager for the arts, through repeated unideal circumstances, the hesitation eventually spreads.

The second issue is, when you look at most of the facilities, 90% of spaces are set up for sports, with perfect respect for each of the sports. The proper type of floor and measurements for basketball for example. Same thing with soccer. Every sport has their own full scale operation, with the proper attire and discipline regarding practice. When it comes to application of our programming within these spaces, we may be stuck in the corner of a basketball court, or badminton is being played at the same time as we are trying to run an art lesson. Would the opposite situation occur? There are rules, and regulations and expectations in the world of sports. In observing this, I am simply recognizing that there is an extreme lack of balance here. Sports probably take up about 90% of space and attention, whereas the arts, if they are lucky take up 10%. This is where the ratio 90:10 comes from. This is likely how the budgets unfold as well, leaving very little space for the arts to develop. It's not that our entire population doesn't care about the arts, but they are thought of as a luxury, and are not accessible and not visible. So how can we change this? How do we find balance?

All of this is not at all to say that sports are not important. I actually used to want to be a soccer player but ended up becoming a ballet dancer. All my life I would be practicing at the barre, and looking out the window at the kids playing soccer. In Poland, teachers were really strict so I would get caught watching the soccer game and my teachers would throw chairs at me! But my mom put me in ballet, and I had to do what my mom told me, so I did ballet. After three years however, I could feel the power of ballet, and the practicing started paying off, in terms of my strength and dexterity, and general excitement and commitment to the art. Everybody has their own path.





Artistic Director's Vision



From these 90:10 reflections I came up with the idea of the “cultural educator”. Our organization, Culture for Kids in the Arts, runs after school arts programming during the school year, and enters summer camps for two hours a week during the summer. When our people trained in the arts leave the site, what often happens is the arts are not present again until we come back. The cultural educator would be the person on site everyday; who would be interested in championing the arts; and would engage with children in artful ways and through artistic processes, projects and exercises throughout the week; in between visits from our art educators. This would enable a more consistent connection with the arts generally, and specifically a deeper and more consistent development of the ideas being explored through the projects we would be building with the children. Our role then would be to build confidence in the community, with the front line workers, and others involved, including parents and managers, who themselves may not have had much exposure to the arts.

How to Deal with The Arts?

Further to this, there are many other kinds of roadblocks, especially for those who make decisions based on their yearly budgets. It can be difficult to articulate what exactly you are spending money on regarding the arts if the deeper understanding isn't there. This can bring a lack of confidence at higher levels as well. Schools and community centres may not know where to start or what types of lessons or approaches are available. The Orff method would be an example for music, but this may not be common knowledge. An interesting Orff program could be started by one person, but what if that person leaves, and eventually the Orff teacher leaves? How are they replaced? I have literally seen long forgotten flutes being used in schools as door stoppers, as a result of a good idea put in place, without the sustainable infrastructure to hold it there. Schools often lack such proper support to enable arts based learning. This is why the arts get cut: people often don't know exactly how to deal with them.

A further challenge is that in teachers' college there is often very little exposure to the arts at all. The cultural educator training we are implementing is not at the level of training that artists or arts educators would have, but will develop a foundation for the arts, and will also be perfect for classroom teachers. In situations where the teacher is unsure and uncomfortable with the arts, it can be detrimental for children, and all of the benefits can be lost. Again, it will be like spreading a cold: the skepticism and fear are contagious, so when the teacher sneezes, everyone in the class catches the cold as well.

Arts for Healthy Whole Development

In order for the arts to give us all of the bounty it can provide for our well-being and the development of active, engaged citizens, we need to create the confidence, enthusiasm, and imagination to welcome them wholeheartedly - rather than the headaches and lack of confidence that can take place when the connection isn't there. In order to do this we have to spend a bit of money, and be open to learning. One has to give themselves permission to learn, step by step, in a fun, simple, accessible way. In this sense, people will be excited to learn and grow throughout our community.

The reason I'm so excited about this idea is because I believe so strongly that the arts are important for the growth of every child from the moment they are born. If they are exposed to the arts on an ongoing basis in ways that are appropriate for their age and stage of development, they will be deeply enriched, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. There will be no stopping the Hamilton community from truly becoming the best place to raise and be a child!

WHY DOES ART EDUCATION MATTER?

The Purpose of This Manual



Arts Are For Everyone, Everyday, Everywhere

The purpose of this manual is to begin to demystify the visual arts and art education, and to provide a sense of why art education is important to human development. Therefore it is vital for everyone, everyday, everywhere: beginning with toddlers, children, and youth in particular; who should have various access points to high quality arts education. It is geared towards those who work with people of any age, and who wish to begin to build this understanding. This could mean within community contexts in places such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, or park superintendents, or it could mean with people of all ages in hospitals, hospices, or retirement homes. It could be for a parent who wishes to understand more about the arts, and would like to bring this knowledge to their children.

In the future we intend to provide texts geared towards specific contexts, but this manual is meant as the foundational “first step” text to engage those who would like to deepen their understanding the purpose and role of the arts to human development and to society more broadly.

Through this manual, we hope to support our community partners, and community workers in particular, in the development of their understanding of arts and creativity, so that they can develop their own comfort with the arts, with the reception of arts programming within their context, and with applying this learning in small ways within their context.

Green Skies and Blue Grass

Many people do not have a background in the arts and therefore tend to be somewhat intimidated by them, especially when it comes to contexts where one may suddenly be responsible for engaging children and youth in related activities. Because the arts are not generally highly valued and recognized for their importance in our society, we are not typically in situations where we are exposed to the high quality art experiences that would help us to develop this understanding. There are countless stories about the opposite kind of art experience where a teacher might have told you you were doing something wrong. Or, as in the case of a friend of mine, who was told that the sky had to be blue, and the grass had to be green.

At the same time, there are many stereotypes that are typically held about the arts in North American society. For example, many people assume that art is “talent based” and is therefore something you are either born with, or without. In reality, everybody has “artist parts”, and it is just a matter of exercising these parts, in order to strengthen them. It is no different, in this sense, than learning languages or sports. The more you practice, the better you get, and of course, some people will be more naturally inclined, but creation is a part of what it means to be human. We have, after all, been making art for as long as we have existed. It’s true that food and shelter came first, but these basic needs were followed closely by mark-making on cave walls.

An Author’s History

My name is Renee Jackson, and I, like many others in my field, am a passionate artist and art teacher. All of us who have studied to become art specialists have also studied to be artists, and generally, have an art practice of our own. What often happens in schools however, is that many teachers end up



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teaching subject areas that they are not qualified for, prepared for, or comfortable with teaching. Because the arts tend not to be deemed important, there are many teachers without a background in art or art education who are in a position where they are teaching art. Within the education system this is actually common across subject areas. I myself having ended up teaching grade seven French during my first year as a full time teacher, without any training in relation to this particular subject. This is clearly a systematic problem across the board. Often, due to many of the stereotypes that exist about art, many think that it is an easy class to teach. However, like any class, when done well, the result should be fun and engaging for both students and the teacher, but neither making art, nor teaching art well, are easy feats.

Understanding and Appreciation

Outside of formal education, art education can play an important role within a wide variety of community contexts as well. One doesn't have to be trained in the arts to appreciate and promote the arts, and to engage in arts related activities on their own and with others of all ages. When someone is not comfortable teaching art, or doing smaller arts related activities with children and youth, and does not have a sense of why it is important: then the situation can be detrimental to the relationship a child has with the arts in general.

Also, as I will argue, detachment from the arts can be detrimental to human development in a wide variety of ways, particularly the role they play in helping us to figure out who we are, to express our inner thoughts and emotions, to imagine otherwise, and to become active, critical, creative thinkers and doers. I have heard many tales of teachers or mentors who have, in most cases unintentionally, ruined a child's relationship with the arts, for example by implying they lack "talent", or by correcting creative gestures as in "the sky is supposed to be blue".



Who is Writing This Manual?



Collectively we need to recognize the importance of the arts, and to respect them enough to know that it takes some degree of understanding to engage meaningfully with them, and that deeper arts experiences require intimate knowledge and appreciation of the discipline, as well as teaching skills to do justice to the learning. This doesn't mean you have to be Raphael to teach art, or to lead arts activities. It does mean that you have to know enough to at least feel respect for, and to value the arts, and this is what this manual is all about.

The Process of Becoming

I have been thinking about the role of the visual arts to the importance of healthy human development for sixteen years as of 2016. My career as an art educator began in 2000, with a previous year where I thankfully was enabled to build up experience at SEED alternative school, where I taught a course on my favourite art movements: Dada and Surrealism. Since that time I have been developing an approach to teaching that I call "the process of becoming" (Jackson, 2006) and it is the underlying philosophy upon which my pedagogy has always been based. I have applied it in both the public and private school systems and at the elementary and secondary levels. I now teach it to the post-secondary level pre-service kindergarten and elementary generalist teachers at McGill University, who do not, for the most part, have a background in art. I work with them to help them to understand why art is important, and how to create relevant, meaningful arts programming of all kinds, with a particular slant towards social justice. This teaching manual is largely informed by the process of becoming, by the structure of this course, and by my experience working with these students by bringing visual arts sensibilities into their world; and increasing their own creative capacity, so that they can bring this into their future classrooms.

Benefits of Arts Training

The arts however are distinct in that they are not simply a "skill" in the sense that if you practice drawing, you get better at drawing. Though this is of course true, what is even more compelling about the arts is that the more you learn, the better you become at being a human. They help us to feel and think more deeply, to be moved by beauty, and to be better at engaging with complex situations and problems. The reality is that the arts are key to human development in a wide variety of ways that I will get into in more depth throughout this manual. Suffice to say, weak arts education and lack of concern for this area of learning takes away from what it means to be a whole human being.

Creation and Hope

Through the act of creation: that is, turning something into something else; or a material of some kind into an object that communicates something from within us; on a deeper level we develop an understanding that the world is transformable and that each of us can contribute to this transformation. Through this act, we develop the understanding that we have an affect on the world: that the world is not static but evolving. The recognition that we are each creators then, instills a sense of hope: one does not simply have to accept something as is. We are creators.

In my opinion, this sense of hope is imperative to well-being. The world affects us, and we can affect it right back. When we are not participants, we are not learning to be active, engaged citizens and we are not then developing a deep relationship with our communities.

This manual is for those who wish to increase the role of meaningful programming to their context, to help to develop and strengthen civic engagement, and to bring a wider variety of fun, engaging and



Who is Writing This Manual?



relevant programming into their context. It is for those who wish to begin to develop their own confidence and understanding when it comes to the arts and creativity. It is for those who wish to themselves become more creative and to feel the world on a deeper level, in order to support others, primarily children and youth, but people of all ages, in the quest to become more creative, expressive and hopeful as a society.

Art Training Makes Better Educators

Whether or not they wind up teaching visual arts specifically, there is no denying that the development of their own creative capacity will make them better overall educators. Many of my students have attested to the affect this course has had, not only on their teaching, but on a shift in perspective that in fact has enriched their lives more generally. This affect is not unique to me as an educator. It is the response that many of my colleagues have also witnessed with exposure to the arts more generally. It is from the university students with whom I have worked in particular, that I have learned about their insecurities and perspectives about art over the last seven years, and I have appreciated their forthrightness in this regard.

CKA and Artasia

I have also been deeply engaged with the arts in a community capacity since 2010 through Culture for Kids in the Arts (CKA), in Hamilton Ontario. It is with/for this exciting not-for-profit organization that this teaching manual has been created. The CKA Artasia program was born in 2010, and this was the program through which I worked closely with the Artistic Director, Vitek, and Coordinator, Victoria, to bring it to life as the Artasia project leader. From the moment I began talking to Vitek and Victoria, there was an incredible harmony to our ideas and approaches to arts education. The process of becoming as a core philosophy works perfectly in relation to the forward looking vision and purpose that Vitek had imagined for CKA, and that Victoria connected with as an artist and art educator herself. From this time, we have moved forward with the CKA Artasia project as an interconnected entity.

What is Artasia?

Artasia is a large scale, complex, art education movement, engaging approximately 500 school aged children (ages 6 - 12) through approximately 15 sites across the city of Hamilton and into Burlington and Brantford, Ontario. The project starts with collaborating with the director and coordinator to establish the plan for the year. Following this I was responsible for planning six weeks of visual arts curriculum, training 3 - 4 post-secondary level students (apprentices) to deliver the curriculum, and 6 - 9 secondary students (mentors) to support the apprentices. This training also involved specialized skills, such as photographing and organizing photos of the children and their work, baking cookies for the children, and also involved the preparation of project examples that would be executed with the children for example: silk-screening, audio recording, etching aluminum, working with textiles, sculpting, paper-making, and painting; depending on the project.



I also planned all of the logistics involving material preparation and dissemination to approximately

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Who is Writing This Manual?



15 different community sites across the city of Hamilton, and in collaboration with the director and coordinator planned the final exhibitions. For the final two years I planned community workshops for the public during the large-scale arts celebration in Hamilton known as Supercrawl.

In addition I wrote all of the didactics explaining the work of the children, and text for various purposes including final exhibition catalogues. The final exhibitions were each large-scale, professional level installations of the work of the children. These projects also involved a level of collaboration with a local artist. At times the artists created separate works inspired by the work and ideas of the children, and at other times the work of the children would be combined with the work of the artist.

Final Thoughts

CKA is an unstoppable force in Hamilton, and I feel great privilege to be involved in this work. The vision dreamt and put into action by the artistic director, Vitek Wincza, “Escaping 90:10”, a call to action bringing high quality arts education to all children in our city, is enabling Hamilton to truly be the best place to raise a child, as it continues to grow stronger. The coordinator, Victoria Long-Wincza, holds everything together, reaching out to community partners, ensuring the vision can come to life. The three of us together are Artasia’s “core team”. I was the Artasia project leader for four years, but since 2014, I have stepped back from leading the project and each summer we are now fortunate enough to have new arts educators step into this role. We work out the plans, applying all of our artistic perspectives to come up with interesting themes and plans based on Artasia’s co-developed pillars and principles. We then go off into our corners to work on our areas of expertise. As Vitek has always said, three of us together, each of us alone. The work is a constant ebb and flow of coming together as one, and parting again to focus





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Watching Artasia: Testimonials



on our areas.

This manual then is written by all of us, and Artasia was built from scratch together, carried for the most part on Vitek's back, as he is the one who is ultimately responsible for the big vision overall success of the project. In addition, we have been well supported by the community organizations with whom we work - Today's Family, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA and Wesley Urban Ministries. Every year the apprentices and mentors who work directly with the children, breathe their own passion and energies into the project, so traces of them are found in our manuals as well. And finally, the children with whom we work are the lifeblood of all that we do, and our ongoing interactions with them feed into this as well. Perceptions of Art and Arts Education

CKA has existed since 1999, so as an organization we have been interacting with our partnering agencies in various capacities since that time. From our experience we know that similarly to the pre-service teachers I have worked with in the past, community mentors and leaders can also be intimidated by the prospect of engaging in art activities with children and youth. It makes sense that this would be the case, because if you hadn't ever really been exposed to the arts and arts education, how could you be expected to lead arts activities? We see a need to fix these problems.

Based on our experience working with the community, and feedback we have received in various forms including officially via questionnaires and surveys; but also through our everyday interactions; we would like to take the time to share some of the common perspectives about art and art education that we have come across countless times. It has been indicated to us that there is a really strong need to open a dialogue with the community regarding the role of the arts and artists, and the vital role that art and art education can play towards healthy human development.

We will also share some quotes and perspectives of children, and CKA mentors and apprentices who have worked on meaningful art projects with children, to provide a sense of how the act of making and teaching art can have a deep impact on everyone involved. None of this has to do with personal judgment. It is a look at where we are; and where we can go together, in a positive way, as we create opportunities for arts, for everyone, everywhere, everyday!

When we as art instructors enter a community site where the agency staff are engaged and excited for the arts instructors to be there, the children too are engaged and excited, and it makes our work together very powerful. The following are reflections from art instructors that really drive this point home. (The names of people and locations have been removed. People are referred to as capital letters, and locations are referred to generically as "this location"):

"...the kids at this location really look up to the workers there, and if the workers aren't participating then the kids won't want to either. A big thing I found was making a dialogue with one of the workers as to making sure she was engaged so the kids would be engaged. A big moment during my time on site is that team work is not a fault but what makes the end goal happen. I thought I would be able to do everything/most of the teaching by myself as I've mostly taught classes by myself with great successes. Those three sessions at this location taught me that I needed to work as a team with the workers, and working with one in particular (B) was a great experience and the kids seemed to have a blast and were happy to see me the next week."

"My overall experience at this location was mixed. There are wandering kids who have lots of energy and want to be involved, which is a great thing to see as a dance teacher. There is a worker there named B that was awesome as she was always involved with doing the activities and helping out

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with the dances. That being said, she wasn't there the entire three sessions I was there and the other worker there wasn't as involved in the activities, which made it difficult as the kids wouldn't want to do anything if the worker wasn't doing it. So overall again, when there were good moments of the kids having fun and wanting to do the dances it was awesome, but very few of these moments really happened."

"I had a wonderful time at this location. A is the supervisor at this site and he is amazing – he pumps the kids up each week and gets them excited for CKA programming. A also took it upon himself to learn about Japan and teach the kids some interesting facts. The students are all very well behaved and enthusiastic about the programming."

"During my second rotation a few the kids were eager to share with me some of their artwork that they had created during the week. The students were working on foreground, middle ground and background. I was really happy to see that the kids were interested in creating while I was not there to guide them and they went home and practiced. I had two young boys share with me that they taught their younger siblings how to create depth in a landscape drawing! Overall, really fun kids to work with."

"The space was wonderful, the staff was wonderful and very supportive. They documented extensively and posted pics and info on their bulletin board."

"I had a great experience at this location. The sessions were very relaxed and the staff members were very interested and engaged in the program. The staff made a point of having the students show/ explain what they did with CKA to their parents when they picked them up. The kids were always eager and excited to share what they learned with their parents – was great to see this."

"The staff are very helpful and supportive. They are all excited to have arts programming that goes beyond what they can do. The students were also great. Some students have difficult home life and the Y staff report that the programming is one of the most positive things they experience through the week. The kids were very excited and engaged for each project I believe. The lanterns were exciting for them, learning about composition in Japanese art and pastel media; the peach projects were more challenging, but also successful especially from the perspective of students thinking about what constitutes a gift or treasure. It was great to see students really getting into creating colour gradation. The kids explored Japanese brush painting without knowing it-using a feather to create thick and thin lines (spirit in the stroke) and pattern to create a mock scroll."

"Again, the kids here are picked up early but the parents all seemed to have a very friendly relationship with B, so she would engage each one, and their child in a conversation about the activity we had done that day, the overall topic of Japan, and our program - which was great. Each session, the parents really got a good rundown of what their kid was doing, and since they were there early, they usually got to see at least some of it in action. There are a couple kids who are quite interested in art and would really take their time to do detailed work. Though the kids are mostly younger, the small group size and very supportive staff made it a great experience all around."

From these final quotes, you can see the impact on the children's' personal development:

"The children were over the moon in Class #2 when we worked on stage combat for the karate-style fight between Momotaro and the Onies. Their eyes lit up and they lost their self-consciousness and had a wonderful time. The volunteers & staff were helpful in keeping them from getting too excited. Staff participated in the stage combat with enthusiasm which helped the kids to go all out with their performance and the staff helped me enforce the safety rules."



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Watching Artasia: Testimonials



"One of our lesson plans involved using ink (black tempera watered down) and the students painted fish on white paper. The students did not use pencil first they went straight to painting. I encouraged the students/ made them aware that it was OK to make mistakes and mistakes can make the work beautiful. When students made mistakes they made things out of them- e.g. they made bubbles coming out of the fish mouth, or they made fish food if they splattered on the paper. It put a big smile on my face to see the kids accepting mistakes and not getting discouraged."

"...it was awesome to see students consider making a happy accident as a positive thing. One brush painting turned into a shark thrashing about, making the water splash. It was gratifying to see many students focusing so hard and creating some quite accomplished pieces. The most memorable for me was when a boy chose to use pastel to create gradation in his peach. He worked hard for the entire time and felt really proud of the beauty he had created of the yellows to reds blend."

These are perfect examples of the deep impact arts programming can have when agency staff partners are enthusiastic and engaged!

The Cultural Educator is You

This manual is meant for everyone, beginning with CKA's community partners and their staff, with whom we work closely at all levels. We know that when we deliver arts programming on site in the community with our partners, it is ultimately powerful when onsite staff are as excited about the arts as we are, and are comfortable work with us and the children in a true partnership. In order for this to happen, onsite staff require knowledge and experience with the arts. No one would be expected to support children with their French project if they had never been exposed to the language. This basic groundwork is key for all of the arts programming we already run, like our CKA After School Arts Program throughout the school year, and Artasia in the summer.

But our plans also go beyond ambitions to strengthen the greatness that is already there. We think



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The Idea of a “Cultural Educator”



it is important for everyone in Hamilton to have a sense of the importance of the arts. When this happens, it will contribute a vital part to Hamilton’s ambition to be “the best place to raise a child.” Towards this goal, we imagine that every hub in our community working closely with community members of all ages, will have a cultural educator on site who is a person who has worked with us to build their understanding of the arts, as well as their own capacity to lead arts programming and to champion the arts within their community. Imagine, an arts leader in every place in Hamilton (and beyond) that comes into contact with community members. The arts can bring people together, and help us to make our communities even better!

CKA’s artistic director Vitek Wincza began reflecting on the 90:10 discrepancy (the sports\arts imbalance), and envisioned Cultural Educators to do just this. His strategy for working on the root of this issue; to truly enable the ratio to find balance; was to develop the opportunity for people who work in various contexts in our community to develop knowledge and understanding of the role of the arts; and of arts based teaching strategies and projects; in order to bring this knowledge back into community settings across the city and beyond. The idea is to build confidence and clarity in relation to this world of the arts that up to now has seemed abstract and mysterious to those who at best do not happen to have much experience in this world; or at worst have had negative experiences in the past that have tainted their perspective, through no fault of their own.

A Vision for the Future

CKA has a history with our partnering agencies (YMCA, Today’s Family, Boys and Girls Clubs and Westley Urban Ministries), so the cultural educator project begins there, with a vision for the future of working within health care contexts, youth detention centres, day cares, populations who face physical and cognitive challenges, and beyond. Bringing arts education to everyone, everywhere, every day is the goal of this project. When we succeed in doing this, our overall population will be better off in terms of capacities affiliated with the arts such as creativity, compassion, reflection, imagination, and the ability to communicate complex ideas in a variety of ways.

Cultural educators will be selected from within their community context, to come to CKA to engage in various levels of professional development and capacity building over time. They will then be prepared to bring their knowledge back into their context to work with their key population, and also to help build the understanding of their colleagues. The vision here is to provide evolving resources specifically tailored to the needs of individual community contexts, and to provide ongoing workshops, guidance, and certification based on this manual. The workshops will involve various levels of certification, as well as specializations. Yearly quality delivery meetings will ensure conversations and interactions are ongoing between cultural educators and CKA, and will ensure CKA can fulfill the specific needs of the cultural educators in order to maintain relevant, meaningful programming for children, youth and beyond. As the world changes, strategies and approaches must change as well.

There is a reason why human beings have been making art for the 2.5 million years since our early ancestors existed. Though its purpose changes through time, art is a part of who we are, and of what it means to be human. Humans have a need to create because it helps us to find meaning. The arts are not frivolous.

Arts education is an important way of deeply connecting us to the world, and when this happens, we learn how to appreciate the beautiful aspects, as well as to question the not so beautiful parts.



Why Art Education? Overcoming Stereotypes



Societal Structure

It is important to consider for a moment the kind of world in which we live, because this helps to both explain why art is not generally considered important within the context of our society, and it also precisely why we need to remember why it is important. Our society is capitalistic, and this informs who we are on a deep level; everything about our society revolves around this fact. In North America capitalism is at the core of everything. The economy is what our governments spend the most time worrying, thinking and talking about. The economy and corporations are more important than the health and well-being of nature and people. Corporations, in fact, are considered by the law to be “persons”, and therefore have rights. Corporations in the United States in fact have the same rights as human beings. We no doubt treat corporations better than we treat some humans.

Art and Capitalism

Being a capitalist society means that we learn from a young age that “success” means money, and that our main goal in life is to make money so that we can buy stuff. This also implies that we should compete with one another to achieve this goal. Because money is more important than nature and humans, this also implies that it is okay to damage humans or nature in order to achieve this goal.

The Influence of the Media

In the meantime, media and advertising work really hard to show us where we should be spending our money. They know that the best way to get us to spend money is to play on our emotions. They find



War Cripples, Otto Dix

Why Art Education? Overcoming Stereotypes



new ways to manipulate us into feeling like we need things that we do not need. Things to help us become prettier, younger, smarter, thinner, more noticeable, more popular, cooler, and most of all HAPPIER. But of course this doesn't work. When our lives revolve around money, the only thing that happens is that a giant void grows in us because we spend so much time focusing on money that the things that truly do bring meaning and joy to our lives are completely ignored: the void grows proportionately bigger, the more we concentrate on money.

Lessons of Capitalism

Capitalism is what our society has become, and we live in society, so we live in capitalism. Like the old metaphor of a fish in water, we don't even notice the capitalism in which we swim. Because it is everywhere, it is also our biggest teacher. We learn more from capitalism than we learn from anything or anyone else.

Capitalism teaches us to be individuals who put ourselves before anything, or anyone else, and to compete to the point where we will step on others if it means that we can make an extra buck. Capitalism teaches us that money and stuff are more important than everything. It teaches us to feel inadequate if we don't have stuff. It teaches us that to want things that we don't need; even things that are often even bad for us.

This of course doesn't mean that everybody in North America is stepping on everyone they know to "get to the top". But it does mean that this is the strongest message we are receiving through many channels; through advertising, television, governments, education, peer-pressure, family, work, and so most of us have exposure to it, to some degree.

Think for a moment about all of the stories you have heard about the response of family members when someone in a family dies. This is capitalism showing one of its ugliest faces.

Imagine how things would be different if money wasn't the most important thing? Imagine for a moment, replacing money with people? Imagine if we valued people more than anything else. What would the world look like then?

Art and Protest

So, what does this have to do with art? Artists are the first ones to critique society, and to share their insights through their work. They are also the first to be punished for doing so. A 2014 exhibition "Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany" draws attention to the artists who were working during Hitler's reign, and the treatment of these artists by Hitler for voicing any trace of dissent. As explained in an article in The Guardian: "Attacks on art began almost immediately after Hitler's accession in 1933, often in spontaneous, private *schandausstellungen* (shame exhibitions)." For example, Otto Dix, who exposed the ugliness of war in such work as "War Cripples" from 1920, was often targeted by these shame exhibitions. According to the Nazi's his works were "insufficiently patriotic". Though there were many various reasons why works were considered unacceptable at that time, they all countered the government's vision in some way.

Currently, the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (Never Sorry: <http://m.imdb.com/title/tt1845773/>), whose work speaks out against the government in many ways, has been arrested for this work, many times, though the government doesn't overtly say this is why. They arrest him and interfere with his life under many guises including "incomplete departure procedure" at the airport, and for tax reasons. The government also invents many stories in an attempt to make them seem good, and Ai Weiwei seem bad to the general



Why Art Education? Overcoming Stereotypes



population. He currently remains under heavy surveillance and restricted movement but he continues to criticize his government through his work (from Wikipedia.. cite the film and find another article).

In the situation of dictatorships, artists become a threat and so are removed from the picture in any way possible. During Hitler's reign, he of course supported artists that fit his ideal. Such works were very traditional and based on a neoclassical style, that is to say work inspired by Greek and Roman art : idealized humans in classic poses. Anything "modern", or anything that revealed truths about modernity, was considered degenerate, hideous, and insane. From these examples you can see how art or the "visual" is a powerful entity, and it can be used in various ways, to communicate certain truths, or even to conceal them.

Art and Propaganda

Propaganda is defined as: "the organized dissemination of information to influence thoughts, beliefs, feelings and actions", and it played a very important role during Hitler's reign. This meant gaining control of all sources of dissenting views such as "newspapers, magazines, books, public meetings, and rallies, art, music, movies and radio", (US holocaust museum website). Basically all art and media related entities, were replaced with their own art, images and texts, depicting the Nazis in the positive, heroic, light in which they wanted to be perceived by the masses. Hitler's army raided libraries in addition to art collections, in order to preserve a positive view of who they were and what they were doing. In other words, they tried to keep the people from thinking for themselves.

What artists do, is they offer other points of view, or "counter-narratives" to visions that become dominant. I use this frightening example of Nazi Germany because it is a clear example of how powerful arts and media are, and how they can be used both to control, and to liberate. In our contemporary world, they continue to be used for both of these purposes.

When capitalism is the most powerful force in a society, it becomes the dictator, though the situation is obviously more subtle than it was in Nazi Germany. Propaganda takes the form of advertising, which to most people, by contrast, seems innocent enough. But, in reality, being taught that money and products are the most important things in life produces many painful side-effects. Money as our core value teaches us to be shallow, and leaves us empty.

Adolescents either completely buy into this world, or with fresh eyes, as they begin asking questions, tend to push back against the ways of the adult world. As they struggle to figure things out they instinctively feel this emptiness, yet are generally unaware of where it comes from. We as the adults of society, are not teaching them what to plant inside that emptiness, as many of us are ourselves lost : unfulfilled by our jobs, and not quite fulfilled by our marriages. At best this manifests in youth as a feeling of being lost, at worse, young people try to fill this empty feeling with more destructive behaviours which either numb the feeling or replace the empty feeling with something else (Gaboré Maté).

Redefining Whats Normal

Propaganda also presents a particular life model based on certain "norms". This requires a 9 - 5 job that we are likely detached from, marriage, children, a house, two cars and maybe a cottage. Because this model is considered the "norm", anyone who falls outside of it is perceived as "abnormal". These norms are limiting. For sure such a lifestyle can work for many people, but ask yourself, in a country of 35 million, or 319 million in the U.S., what are the chances that this exact vision will be right for everyone? And what happens if you try to live within this model, and it actually isn't right for you?

Why Art Education? Overcoming Stereotypes



What would the long term effects be? And what happens to our young people when we don't help them to figure out their way around these limiting models? What happens when they don't know who they really are, or who they want to be, and what they are passionate about in life?

The act of creation, whether it be related to visual art, poetry, fiction, theatre, dance, or music, by its very nature, forces the creator to look at themselves and to reflect about life and the world. In order to make something, you have to ask yourself, well, what should I make and why? You need to look around and ask, what needs to be said? The world has a powerful impact on all of us: it affects the way we think and feel. When we put our own ideas back into the world, we affect it, we give a little push-back to the mainstream vision that is continuously thrust upon us. Both experiencing art and making art helps us to think and feel in general, and to think and feel in new ways. It shakes us up, it renews our sensibilities.

Imagery and Power

The visual is powerful. Hitler used visual language in order to build support for his ideals. His own portrait for example, an image widely shared at the time, could only be released with his approval. He needed to present himself in a particular kind of way. He knew the power of the visual, and he used this power to do his bidding.

When we teach young people to work with visual language they develop their capacity to think critically about the visual images that surround them everyday. Messages that can be both harmful, as in the case of media pressure, or stimulating, in the sense that good art helps us to think more deeply about life. If we don't learn to "read" the visual, propaganda, through media, can have power over us of which we are not even aware. The things that art can teach us in order to counterbalance this propaganda are lost on us because we are not able to interpret meaning, or because we simply dismiss it, having never learned its relevance.

It is the process of creation, or being a creator, that does "something" to us. It requires certain parts of ourselves to be activated. If we want to make something we have to find some kind of inspiration or leaping-off point from which to create. This requires a certain amount of attention. We have to pay a certain kind of careful attention to the world, in order to notice something of interest to us: something that stands out, or "speaks" to us, over all other things; or something that causes us to question the world in some way.

Sources of Inspiration

Because art is about life, this "thing" can be just about anything. We may, for example, notice something beautiful and want to capture the essence of that beauty to share with others; like the Impressionists who wanted to capture the beauty of things like lily pads on water; or skies and mountains; by focusing on light and colour.

Or, we may notice some kind of gross injustice, and want to figure out a way to help other people to notice it, like Emory Douglas, who created prints about civil rights. We may want to use art as a vehicle through which to bring people together to heal, like Doris Salcedo; the Columbian who creates highly detailed, obsessive work about political violence and public interventions in order to bring people together to mourn, and to overcome intense loss. For example, a year after the murder of popular political satirist Jaime Garzón, Salcedo provided Garzón's brother and sister with dried roses that were tied together. They walked from his home to the point where he was murdered four and a half kilometres away. Salcedo explains that this was a slow and solemn act that took the whole day. In another work, nearly 24, 000



Why Art Education? Overcoming Stereotypes



candles were meticulously laid out by Salcedo in Plaza de Bolivar, Bogotá, in response to the death of Columbia's Valle del Cauca Deputies who had been taken hostage in 2002. The public then entered the square to participate in the lighting of the candles:

"The Act of Mourning consisted of first placing these candles in a very specific way, a reticular way, and then having people join us, having this installation that lasted six hours . . . is something that for us was very important because in Colombia—because of our political situation and our violence situation—we have become dehumanized and for me, what Doris was trying to do by this Act of Mourning was teach us how to mourn."

—Carlos Granada

Interview with MCA Chicago

The Art of Creation

Once we notice or question something, we need to take the time to reflect in order to sort out how we feel, and to work through how to go about expressing our thoughts and emotions about this thing. We need to figure out the form this expression will take. Will it be a painting? A public intervention or a print? After spending time developing ideas, experimenting with materials, trying and failing, and evolving our idea, we express something and put it into the world. An art work that is put into the world has an affect on that world in either a small way; when it is shared with fellow students in a classroom, or a big way, as in the work by Doris Salcedo. It is through such acts of creation that we learn that we can and do affect the world. On a deeper level, we exercise our capacity to empathize, and also to recognize that the world isn't static: it is transformable. Acts of creation remind us of the possibility of transformation.

Art and Democracy

The act of creation helps us to pay close attention to the world, question it, reflect deeply and express our own ideas back into it and affect others with new perspectives. This is democracy at its best, enabling a multitude of ideas and perspectives to be shared with others and to allow our ideas and perspectives to shift in relation to what we learn from others. The arts enable us to actively engage, and converse directly with the world, and they can play a key role in helping us to figure out who we are in relation to that world.

Art is key to feeling a sense of wonderment, as well as the capacity to think critically. The more we create, the more highly developed these capacities can become. These capacities are not only important to art, but they are important in other areas that are often considered in opposition to art; like science. More importantly, they contribute to what it means to be human. What I mean is, art helps us to figure out who we are in relation to the world; as opposed to simply accepting the world as it is; and the capitalist goals



WHY DOES ART EDUCATION MATTER?

ARTASIA PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES



that are imposed upon us.

The process of creation helps us to “feel the world” on a deep level. We are moved to feel an incredible sense of wonder, to be critical, and to recognize that there are extreme flaws that we can overcome. Art teaches us to feel both the beauty and ugliness, and helps us to deal with both through celebration and perspective sharing. We are not all meant to be professional artists; but exercising the capacities it takes to be an artist helps us to be better at being humans.

ARTASIA programming is based on 5 Pillars and 3 Principles. The Pillars are: Art, Education, Civic Engagement, Environmentalism, and Innovation. Our programming involves each of these Pillars in various degrees depending on the project.

The Principles are: Imagination, Seeing Potential, and Children's Voices. They each play key philosophical roles in our work.

Pillars

The Artasia pillars are somewhat straightforward. Each is an ingredient that should play a role in the soup that is an Artasia curriculum. Depending on the project, certain flavours may recede or dominate, but they should always be present.

One should always be able to find an answer to the question “What role do art, education, civic engagement, environmentalism and innovation play in relation to the project?”

Principles

Imagination plays a key role in the reflective capacities of the children; fueling their ability to see potential, and to have ideas to give voice to. Imagination is key to everything. It is through imagination that we create. It is through imagination that we can see things in new ways. It is through imagination that we enter empathy. It is through imagination that we allow ourselves get carried into other worlds. It is through imagination that we invent and experiment. It is through imagination that we adapt to situations. Through imagination we can problem-solve. Through imagination we daydream. And so imagination has a core radiating position within the Artasia movement.

Seeing Potential

Cultivating the ability to see potential is the second principle of ARTASIA. This ability begins by encouraging awareness that when we create works of art, we are literally transforming matter; or making things into other things. A cork becomes the body of a creature, or paint in a tube becomes a portrait. Consciously acknowledging this awareness implies the understanding that everything is “transformable” so long as you can imagine.

If children understand that they can affect their surroundings and one another, they are more likely to understand that they can affect change more broadly. This understanding can enable them to see potential in themselves, one another, and the world around them. With this ability we hope to nurture an underlying feeling of hope.

In order to develop this type of awareness and active connection with the world, we base our curriculum on the capacities of Attention/Questioning, Reflection and Expression. The idea is that by developing each of these capacities on an ongoing basis, children and youth use them not only for creation; but the same capacities could be said to be at the core of what it means to be active, engaged citizens, who pay attention to, and question, their community; think about it deeply; and express new ideas into



Artasia Pillars and Principles



it, through various types of action. “Expression” in this sense implies creation, but “expression” is what comes through us, or from within us, and can also be applied to our everyday actions like helping a neighbour, or picking up that piece of garbage.

Children's Voices

Our programming involves various means of disseminating the children’s voices into the community, taking the voices of children seriously, and demonstrating this in a variety of ways. In so doing, we hope to support the city and our communities in the absorption of the belief that children have plenty to teach adults, and that we should be listening closely to their perspective. This act of listening of course, also builds confidence and empowers our children to listen to themselves.

The yearly large-scale exhibition we build with children is of course an important means of sharing their thoughts and feelings with the community, but we also use a variety of creative and innovative ways to further accomplish this goal. For one, we surround the children with professional artists and film-makers who create work inspired by the children’s voices. This can literally mean sharing recordings of their voices as in the installations by Victoria Fenner and Eric Powell, inviting community members to press buttons triggering children describing the sounds in their neighbourhoods, and the sounds they would hear if you transformed the neighbourhood according to their vision. Children at one site in the city for example wanted to add a zoo to their neighbourhood.



WHY DOES ART EDUCATION MATTER?

Artasia Pillars and Principles

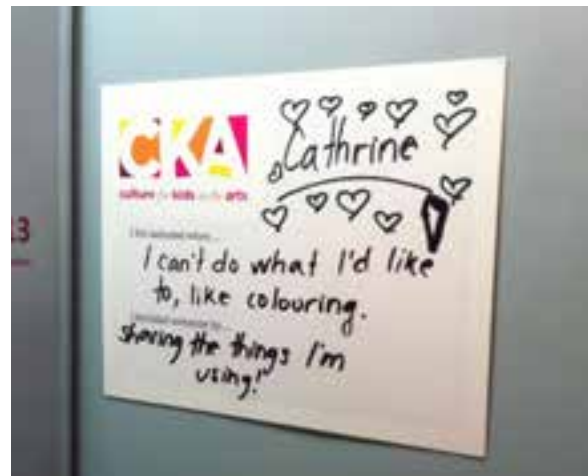


At different times we have implemented professionally printed postcard initiatives featuring children's work so that they can be circulated on a large scale. One example was eliciting a response to the questions: What do you love about Hamilton? What would you change about Hamilton?



We also implement public intervention projects such as "Guerrilla Graffiti Signs" in order to share the ideas of the students with the community. This was a project where groups of children across the city of Hamilton responded to the prompt written on a plastic-core sign: "Imagine a _____ here", and then promptly staked them into the ground to be shared with the community.

During Artasia 2013, "Inclusion, Sense of Belonging, and Compassion", children created a set of inclusion/exclusion cards in response to the prompts: "Think about a time when you were excluded from a group and a time when you helped someone to feel included in a group". These responses were gathered on blank cue-cards to be shared with the wider community. This became a campaign where we invited members of all ages in the Hamilton community to also participate by responding to the same prompt. The project engaged the entire community to awaken empathy as well as to share practical examples of how to be inclusive.





Why Do Artists Matter?



Artists pay close attention to and question the world. They reflect deeply and express thoughts, ideas, perspectives back into it. Every art work that goes into the world has an effect on the world on some level. This effect may be small or large, depending on many variables. If many people see a particularly powerful work, each of those people will be affected to some degree. They carry those affects within them and can even share those affects through conversation. Affects can spread and transform the way people think, feel, and even act in the world. It is their job to help us to think critically and to engage with the world more deeply. Artists reveal things to us about ourselves. They help us to feel. They bring us into the imaginary in order to rethink the things we think. They flip things upside down, they crack us open. They help us to work through our own emotions, challenges, and hardships. They help us with the bigger questions: Who are we? Why are we here?

Artists and Diversity

As long as there are artists, there will always be thousands of different types of artists. Some will be brilliant, some will be terrible. We will never suddenly have 100% agreement on who fits into which category. What is more important is that there are a wide variety of types. Many artists saying many different things. There is one “mainstream” perspective right now, ruled by capitalist ideals. This more dominant perspective that tells us what is “right” or “normal”. We need many different other types of stories being told in order to counterbalance this mainstream story that leaves many people out. It is important for many types of stories to be told, from many perspectives, even though some will be better told than others. The more voices that can be heard, the more we listen to, and learn from, the better off we are. We don’t have to love them all, but there needs to be space at the table for a variety of perspectives.

How Do We Place Value on Art?

It is difficult for people to understand why art work can be worth millions of dollars. People often think this is a waste of money, particularly when it comes to abstract work. They think “my kid could paint that”. There is a lot of opposition to art and a view that art is a waste of time, and especially, of money. This is just one part of the story.

Keep in mind, first of all, that governments and corporations don’t want people asking too many questions. They think there are good reasons to keep the general public from appreciating art. In addition to this, many artists continue to struggle to get their work into the world because it is difficult to make money. Many artists do other things in addition to their practice, and so don’t have the time and energy to focus fully on their work. Consider sports for a moment. Many players make more than we can imagine making in a lifetime. This is also the case for a few superstar artists, but, as Vitek explained in the 90:10 analogy, there is a great imbalance here as well. Sports are safe because they give people something to be entertained by, without having to think or question too much.

Art is an ongoing definition of itself. It is always changing and evolving depending on the type of world it is born into. When there was very little literacy in the world, religion was delivered to the people through images. When the camera didn’t exist, painters painted portraits and documented stories and events. After the camera was invented everybody thought that painting would die, but instead it reinvented itself. It was no longer important for painters to do the same job as the camera. Painting became about exploring other things about the world: like dreams, and our inner psyche, as in Surrealism. Or, by highlighting other aspects about the visuals around us by focusing on certain aspects: as in light and colour for the Impressionists; or by exaggerating elements as in Abstract Expressionism

Why Do Artists Matter?



(de Kooning); or by changing colours to depict the emotional depth of a situation (Picasso's blue period).

Abstract Art

At the peak of "abstract" art, painting became about painting only. It was about removing traces of the actual world, and its objects, and nature. It was about bringing together the elements that form visual language: line, shape, texture, colour, value, and space, as a language on its own, independent of saying anything much about the world itself. Instead, painting focused on composing these things in relation to one another. These are the paintings that tend to be criticized in relation to "my child could paint that". It is important to remember first of all that there was a time where this type of art didn't exist.

Painting about the bare-bones of painting; focusing on bringing colour and shape into a conversation with one another; had never happened before. In terms of art this was an amazing new way of thinking about and playing with the questions: "What is art?", Or "What can art be?" In relation to a world that was becoming increasingly abstract (explain further, reference Berger), it makes sense that this would happen on a visual level as well. Art is a metaphor for the time it is made. It represents the world at the time, through visual language, in a way that other languages, like poetry and fiction, even though there are parallels, can't.

Art became less and less about depicting the world as it is, and more about depicting other things about it. For example, at the turn of the 20th century, an influx of new technologies, like cars, trains, machine guns, light bulbs, movies, telephones, and industrialization, contributed to a change of perspective about the world. Things were beginning to move faster, and to be mass produced instead of hand-made. We had more speed and more stuff made with less care. During the first and second World Wars the world itself was becoming more "abstract", harder to make sense of. The world viewed from a train looks much different than it does on foot, or by horse. Art always reflects that which is going on in the world. As the world became more abstract, so did the visual depictions of that world.

Art Teaches Us About Us.

Have a look at this piece by the infamous Banksy below. Banksy is a graffiti artist who creates political work in many countries across the world. Nobody knows his or her real identity. What does this art work teach us about us?





What is Contemporary Art and Why Does it Matter?



Contemporary Art and Children

Contemporary means “of now”. Contemporary art is art that is made by artists who are living. Artists who are living teach us about the world that we live in. Though art history is fascinating, and teaches us plenty about who we are as humans, and where we have been; Contemporary Art teaches us about our world and the questions we face in our world now. Therefore, looking at and talking about contemporary art with people of all ages, particularly children and youth, is extremely important. Because art is always changing; what it does and how it is done will always be contingent on the ways the world is changing, combined with the imagination and skills of the artist who feels that world more fully and deeply than most. This can make it a bit intimidating for teachers or facilitators to talk about.

Sometimes contemporary art can also be controversial and/or address very serious issues like genocide or anorexia. It can be difficult to know when the right time is to address such issues with young people. “How old should they be?” “What will their parents think?” These are important questions and issues to think about and talk about. At the same time, not all contemporary art is controversial or about very serious issues, and I have found over the years that young people really enjoy being asked for their thoughts and opinions about interesting art work that is also relevant to the world in which they live. The key here is having discussions, not lecturing them about what we think these works are about. When you don’t know something, admit it. Don’t be afraid to figure things out together with young people, they have so much to teach us after all!

The Feldman Approach

There are many ways of looking at and talking about art. A classic approach in art education is known as the Feldman approach. This consists of 4 steps: 1. Description 2. Analysis 3. Opinion 4. Judgment

The Elements of Design are: *line, shape, texture, colour, value, and space.*

The Principles of Design are: *emphasis, balance, pattern/rhythm/movement, contrast, unity, and focal point.*

Description

In the first step, one simply describes exactly what they see taking place in the image. For example, in the Bruegel below, I see many people in a village doing a variety of things. Some are playing what I know to be a simple game with a stick and a tire. Others seem to be talking or bargaining over goods. Some seem to be fighting or arguing. There seem to be more sinister things going on as well. Most of them wear very simple clothes. All of this seems to be taking place on a main road in the village, near water and a few trees with thin trunks. The buildings look old world in style.



What is Contemporary Art and Why does it Matter?



Analysis

In the next step, one begins to look more closely at the elements and principles of design. The elements and principles are the visual components of art. This is not to say that this is the only way of talking about art, however, this is some of the basic visual language. The elements work together to make the principles happen in various ways. (In a classroom setting it is good to have these listed somewhere for reference).

In the Bruegel, the colours are very natural looking, mostly warm earthy colours with traces of a turquoise in the water, in the earth and throughout articles of clothing. Other articles of clothing are brown, red and white. There are many different little narratives going on here. My eye seems to be drawn to the middle of the piece first where there are two clusters of people who are standing and not engaging in much action. From there, my eyes move to the foreground, and then into the background, where there is much repetition of people engaging in various actions throughout. Nothing in particular stands out, which really emphasizes the feeling of chaos: my eyes keep moving to try to take in all of these micro-narratives, and I feel like there are too many. Knowing that the title is "Children's Games" is strange. There are a few children's games sprinkled in amongst many non-children's games. As you can see, the analysis blends in a little with the description.

Opinion

From here we can move into forming an opinion of what the work is about. To me, the tension between "children's games" and adult madness is uncomfortable, and blurs the line between innocence and sin. There seems to be a message about the sin of adults being as much a norm as the play of children.



What is Contemporary Art and Why Does it Matter?



Judgment

From here to judgment, I would have to say that the work does a good job of being surprising when you look a little closer, especially if you know the title first. I like that it is telling many stories, but it makes me feel a bit overwhelmed and uncomfortable; though I like the many discoveries there are to make as you keep looking. It would make a good “i spy game”. Art Education and Human Development

Reflection Questions: *As a person who works in a teaching capacity with others, what do you like about this approach to looking at and talking about art? And, how does this method effect us outside of looking specifically at art work? The answers to these questions indicate reasons why art education is very valuable to our everyday development as human beings.*

Plenty of contemporary art is playful and also a great catalyst for meaningful conversation. Take Kim Adam's work for example. We have the Bruegel-Bosch Bus right in Hamilton at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. As you can see, this is a VW bus, completely covered with toys and buildings. What does it mean? Don't be afraid to not know some kind of “right” answer. Like scientists, artists tend to become fixated on a particular type of theme and/or a particular type of media/material from which they make their work, and explore that theme and/or media for their entire career. Often then, they create many art works that relate to each other.

Understanding what we call their “body of work”, can help inform what any one piece might mean; BUT, it is not necessary to know their body of work, or to be an expert on any particular artist, in order to be able to talk about their work. There is still something to talk about even if you know nothing about them.

In addition, there is also still something to talk about even if you don't know that both “Bruegel” and “Bosch” are artists from the past, who both tended to paint scenes that were overstuffed with multiple stories. Bruegel painted everyday peasant scenes as in the example above, and Bosch often depicted religious scenes related to displays of hellish torment, but he also depicted other types of religious narratives.



What is Contemporary Art and Why Does it matter?



By these summaries you can see that they too had their area of focus, even though they were working over 400 years ago. Bosch also packed impossible often hellish creatures and things into his paintings, and Bruegel had hellish undertones as well. Knowing this, and looking at Bruegel and Bosch besides this work can be interesting as well.

Why would the artist give it this title? Many analogies can be made. Bruegel for example has a painting called “Children’s Games”, 1560, and Bosch is well known for his painting “The Garden of Earthly Delights” 1480 - 1505. If you were to mix these paintings together, can you see how the “ Bosch-Bruegel Bus” could be the result?

Kim Adam’s body of work involves toys, miniature figures, details from model sets involving toy cars, trains, campers, miniature people, flowers and trees, often assembled in slightly fantastical ways that you would never see in real life. These items are placed together to form interesting scenes. Adams also blows these up to life size using full scale vehicles, umbrellas, plastic flowers, bringing the impossible, surreality of his miniature scenes into the real world. In gallery settings the audience is often invited to enter into the scenes. This is just one example of a contemporary artist, that we have access to in Hamilton, that is playful and can open up interesting narrative about our world of discarded stuff and toys.

What is Visual Culture?

“Visual culture” consists of all of the images that surround us on a daily basis. It includes signs and symbols like the identifiers for mens and women’s washrooms, signs that indicate poison, and street signs. It also includes icons on our computers, memes, home pages, and blogs on the Internet. It includes graffiti and video games, comic books, construction signs and logos, as well as advertising and film. It includes fashion, textiles, furniture, typography and packaging. Framing visual art in terms of “visual culture” gets us outside of the more formal representations of art that you find in art galleries, and reminds us that art is also visual language, and visual language surrounds us in our everyday lives.

There is increasing acknowledgment in schools and education that literacy now means more than just reading words. “Language texts” are now thought of in terms of combinations of text, audio, visual and gesture. “Literacy” is now thought of in terms of “multi-modality”: meaning that we are constantly interacting and creating in various modes at the same time; visual, spatial, musical, and textual (Albers & Sanders, 2010).

Though there is plenty of debate about exactly what “visual culture” entails, and how exactly to define it. For our purposes it is simply important to know that visual culture is about more than art in galleries, and more than simply a still image. It is also most important to know that “(n)ever before in human history has imagery been so central to the creation of identity or the gathering and distribution of knowledge (Chaplin, 1994 as cited in Duncum, 2001). Understanding the visual is equally as important as understanding the written.

What is Media Literacy?

Although we are surrounded by visuals that play many different kinds of roles in our society, media more specifically sets out to sway a target audience into buying or doing something, with a heavy emphasis on the buying part. Whereas visual art has more to do with expression in terms of emotion, often combined with teaching us something about ourselves and the world; “media” is the stuff that attempts to keep us in line as consumers. Media constantly reminds us that our core value should be “make money - buy stuff”.



What is Contemporary Art and Why Does it Matter?



If you haven't already seen it, The Story of Stuff, which has now become a full-on movement, does a great job of explaining this situation: (<http://storyofstuff.org>)

"Media" includes television, radio, internet, billboard, magazine, poster, and newspaper advertising. Sometimes media is used to promote other projects like getting vaccinated or eating healthy portions; but most of the time it is used to sell products, and a particular type of lifestyle. These lifestyle sets of "norms" are often still based on white, nuclear, families; leaving anyone who doesn't fit these sets of norms feeling somehow left out or not real.

"Media literacy" means understanding the way advertising manipulates us by tugging at our emotions in order to sell us products. Most of the time, advertising is telling us that we will be happier, better looking, more desirable, funnier, braver, and stronger if we buy that car; or that cleanser; or that make-up.

Media literacy means understanding how visual components like line, shape, texture, and colour, come together to create a certain mood; or to draw our attention to a certain thing. It means being able to also pull things together in order to create our own messages about matters that are important to us: like taking care of neighbourhoods, or planting trees. We can use the same tools to do good things, to spread good messages to others. Media is a tool, and it can be used in countless ways. A deep awareness of how it works, helps us to recognize what it is doing, how it is effecting us, and whether it is constructive, destructive, or neutral; or perhaps even various shades of each. Literacy is key to being smarter than advertising.

Young people also use media like video and photography to share perspectives, and narratives that push against the main stream; or to play around with what is already out there, by combining some of their favourite things together to make something new (for example machinima). Young people often already have the impulse to question rules and ways of being and doing in our complex society. In this day and age, technology enables more access to the tools required to create high quality works than ever before: though it must be kept in mind that not everybody has easy access. It still costs money to buy these technologies.

Art Is For Everyone: Our Role as Appreciators

Art is meant to be for everyone. It is not for the elite, or for only those who "get it". If everyone had some kind of relationship with visual art, I believe the world would be a better place. It helps us to think in a different kind of way, to explore emotion, to think metaphorically and poetically and to look at the world around us more closely. When we are able to do this, we become able to form our own opinions about things, find beauty in the everyday, and think deeply about the world itself. If nothing else, looking at and talking about art exercises our observation, reflection, and judgment skills. It helps us to slow down before jumping to conclusions. In other words, it helps us to not react in habitual, knee-jerk type ways, and instead we learn how to respond. A "response" to something involves reflection: we think about something before an automatic reaction.

Art and Abstraction

There are various reasons that have contributed to how and why art became increasingly distanced from everyday life and people. Some of these reasons have to do with the role of art becoming less clear with the invention of the camera. From this point art moved off into multiple directions and it became more difficult to know and understand what it was trying to do. It became more "abstract" and therefore

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less directly connected to everyday reality as we know it, and less easy to understand.

Art became about doing simple things that anyone could do; like signing a urinal, placing it in an art gallery and calling it “art”. Acts like this counter the age old idea of a person being born with talents unattainable by most of us. It takes credence away from the image of the artist as a person separate from the masses. Signing the urinal is the kind of move that doesn’t take the high degree of “skill” that artists required in the past. If you can just do something simple like this then, where is the “value” in it? And what the heck does it mean to place a urinal in an art gallery?

To some this seemed like tomfoolery. It seemed ridiculous. But, what was happening at the time that Marcel Duchamp made this move, is that everything was changing quickly in the world, more quickly than ever before. The world was more confusing than ever. It was being stirred up in many ways by new inventions, world wars, and Einstein’s theory of relativity. Remembering that art is a reflection of the world at the time, it was registering all of this unrest; this lack of stability.

While the whole world was in a tizzy, and changing, placing a urinal in an art gallery, as Marcel Duchamp did, really messed with the conventions of art: it threw the entire role and history of art into question and hundreds of years of realistic painting. Painting style and technology had changed of course, but it was still painting. In all of this chaos and turmoil, Duchamp stirred up the art world and turned it upside down. This move really forced us to ask “what is art anyway?” Duchamp actually did an amazing new thing and really freed art to become a million things, yet at the same time he confused people, especially when, for so long, making art took a high degree of skill, knowledge, and time.

Duchamp’s urinal had nothing to do with any of this. He didn’t even sign his own name to the work - he signed it “R. Mutt”. The main reason he didn’t sign it was he was challenging an art exhibition that stated it would accept all work, and Duchamp wanted to test this “openness”; this seemingly anti-establishment, unconventional proclamation. You see, he noticed something, and reflected on it and he decided to challenge convention through a seemingly simple, yet actually infinitely complex act, that shook up the art world, and changed the face of art forever. Because what he did had never been done before, it was a brand new way of looking at the art world. The capacity to try something completely new and unique is actually not at all simple. He was not imitating someone, or riffing off another art work; he did something completely new. His urinal was rejected and met with outrage.

The Role of Art

This is why we need artists. The main job is, as I recently heard the incredible Columbian artist Doris Salcedo say in a documentary about her work; “art asks questions, it doesn’t answer them” (<https://vimeo.com/120164736>). This job of asking questions is more important than most people realize. When questions stop being asked, dictatorships become possible: whether it is a state based dictatorship; or a more difficult to detect dictatorship like capitalism and the dominance of consumerism as a way of being in the world. Artists help us to think and feel in new ways, and to reinterpret our own lives and our place in the world. Artists help us to remember to take care of each other and the environment. Artists help us to push back against ruling “norms” or ideologies that tell us that making money is all that matters. Artists matter. Art matters. The more people who understand this, the better off our world will be.

This understanding begins with you.



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Everyone has Artist Parts: You Are a Creative Human Being

In our everyday lives we all make artistic decisions in a wide variety of ways. The most obvious are “aesthetic” choices, that is to say, decisions that relate to the elements and principles of art. Our clothes, for example, require consideration of colour, texture, shape and style, as does the way we layout and design our homes. The more we understand about these “visual” decisions, the more we figure out our own personal taste; the better we get to know ourselves. Knowing and understanding who you are as a growing and evolving individual is key to finding “success” on your own terms in life.

Understanding aesthetics also makes us better at paying attention to the world, enjoying it's beauty, and thinking critically about it's problems. The more we understand about aesthetics, the more pleasure and awe we can feel viscerally when we notice the way leaves shimmer in the sunlight, or the intense beauty of a colourful sunset. The more we can “see”, literally, the more we will notice about the way the world works, the more questions we will ask, and the more we will develop an understanding about what we care about most. All of this adds up to finding joy in life, and to being better overall citizens.

Knowing this, we can also apply creative/innovative ways of thinking about challenges and working towards change. This can entail small everyday problems in our lives like a friendship on the rocks, or larger-scale challenges like neighbourhood decline. We will not be inclined to actively do something about things we don't notice or feel a connection with. Aesthetics helps us both notice and feel a connection. It is through aesthetics, in combination with our senses, that we are able to really notice and feel the world, and to let the world into us.

We are each our own wandering galaxies. When we let the world into us in this more aware, conscious way, the things we observe and learn through new experiences, mix with our old experiences and help us to build our knowledge and understanding of the world. As the great education philosopher John Dewey (1924) would say, your experiences leave a residue inside you; a kind of embodied knowledge, so you retain aspects of the experience. The more fully you are involved with the experience, that is to say in an active and engaged way, the thicker the residue. Our insights and wisdoms, over time then, begin to mix with these new experiences, and our knowledge, thoughts, perspectives, and intuitions continue to evolve based on ongoing experiences.

Seeing Potential

We become better problem-solvers when we can be fully informed by our past experiences. Say for example, your chain falls from your bike, and you are without tools. Past experience “tinkering” with tools and using material and tools in unexpected ways will make you better prepared to take random materials you have on-hand, and temporarily rig something up well enough to get you home. There are places in the world where people live with minimal “stuff”, for example, Canada's Inuit population. In the past, when they were nomadic, they couldn't travel with very much, so they kept material possession to a minimum. As a result, they had very acute skills related to resourcefulness.

One of my favourite examples of this is explained by Jean Briggs (1968), an anthropologist who lived with the Inuit for many years. She describes a season where it was time to move but there were few trees to build skis for their dog sleds. What they did instead was to cut up their tents, and use them to wrap fish in a straight line shaped like a ski. They then froze the strip of fish and attached these to their dog sleds. They traveled to the new location, unrolled the tents, ate the fish, and sewed the tents back into tents!

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From my perspective as an art educator, this capacity to use materials in a wide variety of ways for which they are not necessarily intended, is a basic building block for the development of the resourcefulness and problem-solving skills that help us through life on many levels. This learning begins in the material world, but it develops our capacity to problem-solve on deeper levels as well. Once one understands that you can physically transform the world - that a tube of paint can become a detailed landscape; that a collection of found-objects can become an elaborate creature; that a paintbrush can also be used to poke holes in paper: you develop the understanding that any object can be used in a multitude of ways. A paintbrush isn't simply a paintbrush that can only be used to make a wide variety of different marks with various types of materials. It can be anything you can imagine it becoming: a poker/firewood/stem/pinwheel/mark-maker etc...

This kind of understanding of tools and materials does something on a deeper level. We begin to understand that we have an affect on the world. The world is transformable. It is not fixed or static. Through the act of making art, we are not only manipulating materials, but also learning how to communicate in a wide variety of ways. We learn about what we want to communicate; what we care about. Over time we develop an understanding that ideas and concepts can be applied in a variety of ways as well. This understanding is where art that moves us comes from. This is how things are invented, cures are discovered, and theories are developed. This is also how we can develop new strategies for dealing with complex problems like bullying, or poverty, or inequality.

Everything is Interconnected: What is the world like?

Scientists say that we are made of stardust: our bodies contain bits of stars and galaxies. The water we drink is the same water that dinosaurs drank, and we are full of water. We are deeply connected with the world, with humans, and creatures. The way we are, and the things we do, go out into the world and they have an affect in small and big ways. As the world evolves, we evolve, and our general ways of thinking change over time. Our language changes.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the world was changing at a rapid pace. Many things were invented: from the camera, to machine guns, to the light-bulb and steam engines. We moved from being an agricultural society, where we grew our own food, or food for those in our village. We went from knowing the local farmer by name to having no clue where our food comes from. We went from making and repairing things by hand to an industrial society of factories and mass-production. These changes caused a significant shift in the way we thought and acted as human beings

We went from high quality, hand made, clothing to mass produced, low-quality clothing. Ask yourself, what kind of affects did such changes bring to who we are as humans on a deep level, and how we interact with one another, and the world? Even from just these two simple examples, you can see that we became disconnected from one another and the food and goods that we depend on for survival. Although the reality is that we are all interconnected and the world is constantly evolving and ever complex, at this time in the early 1900s, during the industrial revolution, we started thinking and behaving in many ways as if the opposite were true. Since then, we have conceived of the world as if we are all very separate entities; as if the world is static and simple. And, we created our schools based on these premises.



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Children as Teachers

Reflection questions: *If you imagine a traditional classroom, what do you see? Desks in rows, with the teacher's desk at the front of the room? And what does the teacher do?*

The great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (2008), called the traditional “teacher centered” classroom where the teacher tells the students what they should know and makes “deposits” of information into their minds “banking-education”. There is a different model that has taken longer to evolve, but is slowly leaking into educational situations, called “progressive”, or “child-centered” learning. This means that the ideas of the student are central and valued, and that their interests and perspectives are nurtured and taken seriously. This grows a completely different kind of person. In this situation, it is understood that children bring knowledge to the table, and have plenty to teach others. As well, teachers are also students and students are also teachers. When you grow together in this type of learning context, you are actually learning to think for yourself, in relation to others, rather than waiting for somebody else to tell you what to think.

Reflection questions: *What are children like? Can you think of a funny or interesting story related to a child that you know?*

Recently, my niece Chloe, who is 2 years old, was brushing her teeth with her father/my brother Kevin. Suddenly she disappeared and Kevin had to go hunting around for a moment to find her. Where was she you ask? Well, she ran into her room, pulled out her book about Snap the crocodile with the giant teeth, and started brushing his teeth for him! My best friend's daughter Anik used to spontaneously hug trees. I worked with a grade two class once and when we were outside for recess a spontaneous game formed around a piece of ice on the ground. When the sun hit the ice, we cheered and danced around, careful not to let our shadows touch it. The game was that the ice was supposed to melt.

Children make interesting connections. They are spontaneous and pay a lot of attention to their surroundings. They ask questions. They try things out. They play emergent games. In many ways adults forget a lot of what they already knew as children. A teacher-centered classroom where kids have little say, and where the focus becomes standardized tests and evaluations, chisels away at the spontaneous wonderment of a child.

Jeanette Winterson is a lyrical and deep writer of fiction. She also writes eloquently about many non-fictional issues, particularly art and the imagination. She says in her book “*Art Objects*”:

Children who are born into a tired world as batteries of new energy are plugged into the system as soon as possible and gradually drained away. At the time when they become adult and conscious they are already depleted and prepared to accept a world of shadows. Those who have kept their spirit find it hard to nourish it and between the ages of twenty and thirty, many are successfully emptied of all resistance. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that most of the energy of most of the people is being diverted into a system which destroys them. Money is no antidote. If the imaginative life is to be renewed it needs its own coin. (Winterson, 1996)

Reflection questions: *When we apply traditional teaching methods repeatedly with children, or what Freire refers to as “banking-education”, what are they really learning? How are they learning to be in the world?*

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Invisible Implications and “Praxis”

What we do, and how we do things in the world, works on a deeper level that we can't exactly see. I call these “invisible implications”. Paulo Freire teaches us that when we apply “banking-education” methods, on a deeper level, we are merely teaching students to be passive receivers of information in life, and that this is oppressive. By contrast, when we enter into dialogue and exchange with them, when we talk about, and build upon their interests, we enable humanization, and a conscious, active, engaged citizenship. Freire says it is through “praxis” that we can enable humanization. He defines praxis as: “Reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.”

Reflection questions: *And what is it again that artists do? At the beginning of this section, the question is posed: Why do artists matter? How does that section relate to Freire's idea of praxis?*

I add to Freire's idea of praxis the importance of attention/questioning to the equation. Freire also heavily focuses on the importance of questions, believing that curriculum should be built around the questions of students of all ages. What is key here is that Freire's approach to humanization is through praxis, and praxis is what artists, quite naturally, already do. I would say they even help to fill out the idea of praxis a little more by reminding us of the importance of developing our capacity to pay attention.

Attention/Question - Reflection - Action/Expression - Affect/Transformation

Now, let's return for a moment to our reflections about children. What are they like? I have asked this question many times to the students with whom I work and their lists tend to come out similarly: curious, open, funny, ask questions, speak frankly, and honest. Children have several things in common with artists. They certainly pay close attention to the world, and they ask many questions. They already actively engage with their surroundings. And then what happens?

In a quality arts based education, children develop these same capacities as artists, and this supports them in becoming what Freire calls humanized, or active, critical, engaged, passionate people. This is not to say by any means that every artist is the same, or that these capacities aren't also a part of being great scientists or chefs. It doesn't mean that they have to become professional artists, but what art does to us, benefits us no matter what we decide to do in life. It helps us to figure out what to do in life. The arts help us to know ourselves on a deep level.

Invisible Implications

As Paulo Freire says, the way we go about “teaching” does more than simply put knowledge in our heads. Our actions work on a deeper, “invisible” level. If a teacher is forever making “deposits” of information into the mind of a child, the child is actually learning to be a passive receiver of information. This has many side-effects. For example, they aren't learning in this circumstance to believe in, or trust themselves. They aren't learning that they can solve problems, or figure things out for themselves, in a wide variety of ways. They aren't learning that they have a direct affect on the world and other people. They aren't learning about who they are on a deeper level, or who they want to become, or where their passions lie. They aren't learning to find joy in life, or to deal with difficult problems and complex emotions.

If school is meant to help us to survive and thrive in the world, shouldn't it do all of these things? Outside of schools, are these not the most important goals we want to support and develop in children? Because it would be difficult to build the education system again from scratch, a simpler approach to really freeing ourselves from the grips of traditional education is to simply acknowledge the importance of the arts. If this were to happen, appropriate teachers would be hired and more time would be spent on the arts during the school day.



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Inspiring the Children

Everything visible has invisible implications. When a classroom is set up in rows, we are in fact learning that we are all separate, disconnected individuals. Our societal beliefs are reflected in our “architectures”; the visible structures around us, and our thinking and behaviour is affected by those visible structures. If we don’t acknowledge “interconnection” for example, we don’t believe or behave as if we are interconnected. It is important to keep in mind that I am also stereotyping. Not all classrooms or teachers follow these approaches or structures.

At the elementary level especially, tables are often set up in groupings, with a variety of “stations” for play and experimentation. They are set up for kids to explore; particularly at the early childhood education level, where progressive approaches are more often taken. In contrast to the traditional classroom, imagine the invisible implications of groups of tables that are often moved around or change in formation depending on the activities taking place; it would be an alive space where things are often changing. Imagine spaces around the room where students can post inspiring images or thoughts; and tools and materials are accessible, and visible, from which students can take inspiration: it is true after all, that ideas come from all around us, so the way we teach, or work with/interact with children, matters on a very deep level.

Reflection questions: *Now ask yourself, what are kids really learning from this set up? What are the invisible implications of this classroom? Take a moment to write and reflect about this question.*

Art, Science, and Truth

It is not random chance that traditional classrooms took on the form that they did. Everything comes from somewhere. Classrooms came out of our dominant belief system at the turn of the 20th century. This perspective has continued to dominate this entire time, and that still has a grip on us today in various ways. This is an individualistic perspective that comes out of our ideas about reality, which comes from the scientific world. As a society, the general tendency is to believe that the world of science provides us with “truth”. The reality is that the world of science itself is always shifting as new things are discovered. There is no “absolute truth”.

There was a time, for example, when we believed that light traveled through an invisible, undetectable substance called the “aether”. This was an “ad hoc” theory that scientists held because they couldn’t really answer the question of how light traveled for quite some time. Ad hoc means “not quite provable”. Then one day they figured out that light is both a wave and a particle.

Scientists also once thought that the earth was flat; or that once upon a time the elements; earth, air, fire and water were just floating around, and the “earth” element was also made up of animal and body parts. Everything was floating around and being drawn together, and pushed apart, by the forces of love and hate. Animal parts came together to form animals, and any hybrids that weren’t meant to be, died off.

Early Greeks believed that the gods made everything on earth happen. When it rained for example, they would say “god” is raining. And then one day, when the power the gods had over society started to weaken, they began to say “it is raining” (Alioto, 1993). There was then a need to figure out what “it” was. This is where science came from, but it was science at the expense of other ways of knowing things. It was science at the expense of story telling, and mythology, or, the more magical ways of understanding the world.

WHY DOES ART EDUCATION MATTER?

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For a long time we have been held within a Newtonian understanding of the way the world works, and this has had a deep effect on everything we do as humans in the western world. This is not necessarily something that has to be taught directly but the ways we understand the world collectively as humans, affects us all on a deep level, and manifests around us in a multitude of ways. (give examples besides classroom.... ie/shopping malls)

And this reflects the buzz term 21st century learning, which is also really what progressive education has been telling us since the turn of the last century (cite the article... new annotated bibio. "notes").

Reflection Question: *What comes to mind when I say, "invisible implications"?*

Our actions in the world have meaning. They imply things. Classroom environments are particularly important spaces where we can accidentally act on, and impose habitual ways of thinking based on societal constructs or ways of thinking.

For example, boys and girls grow up being told boys are supposed to be a certain way, and girls are supposed to be a certain way. Boys, for example, are instructed in many subtle ways to be the loud and strong, and girls are supposed to be well-behaved and quiet. In a classroom, therefore, teachers may fall into the trap of choosing boys more often to answer questions. This is a very subtle, even unconscious gesture, and the invisible, deeper implication, or idea, that is communicated is that girls have less to contribute than boys, and are less important than boys.

In teachers college, such ideas are also referred to as the "hidden curriculum". This example I just gave is a common one discussed, and simple strategies for ensuring we don't fall into this trap are explored; (for example, randomly selecting popsicle sticks with names).

Invisible Complications

But the concept "invisible implications" runs deeper than this. The world has always been a complex place. If you consider just one person; and all of the experiences, and ideas, and opinions they hold within themselves; and where, and how, those ideas, and opinions, have formed over time; and the mixture of emotions, and moods we each take on in every given moment, depending on that days experiences; and the small details, like the comfort of our clothes, or the affects of the weather; it is easy to recognize that there are many layers of things going on, even just within one person.

If we zoom out, we recognize the complexity of a group of people: the effects/affects of each of their families; their cultural backgrounds; their society and country; and the history of that country, or their country of birth, mixed with the country in which they live. Throw in technology, and all of the access we currently have to information, and to other people: one could say that our world is increasingly complex. Our access to ideas, cultures, advertisements etc., has increased tenfold with the access of technology and the Internet. Information bombards us in a wide variety of ways, and our ability to communicate takes on many forms. We communicate increasingly through machines and less through face to face encounters.



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Classroom as Microcosm

Reflection Question: *Now, pause for a second and picture a traditional classroom again.*

Because our world is complex, and if you accept the idea that the classroom should be preparing us to live fulfilling everyday lives, does it not make more sense to construct a classroom that takes into account complexity? If the classroom is a microcosm where we are attempting to teach about living in the world, it makes sense to reflect the qualities of that world. Complexity is an emergent circumstance where things are continuously changing.

The Importance of Play

Spitting into air conditioners just to see what will happen. Children experiment in the world. They play and invent. When I was doing research in Peru, small children in the shanty town area, who had very little and no “toys”, would play games with soda bottles. In many countries pushing a tire with a stick is a game. Children are resourceful, and they find ways to play.

When I was a child, my brother and I had several intricate imaginary worlds. Our Cabbage Patch Kids were heroes in the “other world” known also as the “x world”. When they were needed in that world a giant mouth would open somewhere and a tongue would come out and pull them back in to accomplish an important mission. The family room would become hot lava and the couch pillows boulders to jump across. They would have to forage for food and make camp fires. Children play. They invent stories. They build. They explore. They do many things that help them to learn and develop in fun and engaging ways. And, many aspects of their childhood can develop into great components of being an adult.

I was an artist before I was a teacher. Through my work, my goal was to inspire a sense of wonderment. I would do this by making creatures that seemed like they could really be living among us. I also took everyday items like napkins and sculpted faces into them. I created “fortune cookies” in the form of “sac-o-bridges” from miniature bridge sculptures based on real bridges in the world, and the idea was that the description of the bridge became a metaphor for your life.

The idea was to reveal the life of poetry and imagination within the everyday; to remind us that the world is an enchanted and incredible place. Children know this. They live it. Young children are exploring and learning through every moment of the day. Everything is new and exciting. As we age, we can lose our capacity to see things anew. The day I realized I wanted to be a teacher, was the day I realized that what I was attempting to do through my work was in fact to teach people, or remind people, that they have this sense of wonderment within themselves.

Reflection challenge: *design an exercise that helps recognize or engage a sense of play for everyone, everyday, everywhere.*

The Process of Becoming: An Introduction

If we learn to simply accept the world as it is: to buy into capitalism, and to have “cultural norms” imposed on us by the media, school, and peer pressure etc., then we are a bit of a closed system. I think of this as “circular living”. Ideas are imposed on us, and we accept them. However, when we learn to pay closer

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We Are All Creators



attention to the world through the arts, we learn to use our senses to help us open up. In the visual arts, by exploring the world through our senses in a variety of ways; sometimes through the elements and principles of design; we begin more consciously to pay attention to the details of the world. Once we engage in this manner, we can begin to question the things we notice. Why are there so many homeless people in my neighbourhood? Why is there a Starbucks across the street from a Starbucks? Why are parks important? And then, we try to answer these questions: and the more we reflect about them, the more deeply we are able to do so.

Finally, such observations, questions, and reflections affect the way we behave. We express our discoveries through conversation, writing, behaviour, drawing, dancing, singing etc., and when we put our words, thoughts, images, and ideas into the world, we affect the world. In contrast to a “closed system” human, this human is an open system: constantly working with the world; growing, and changing as an individual; as they observe, reflect, and share their thoughts and emotions in order to help others to grow and change.

We are not meant to be more or less “static”, unchanging individuals: we are human beings, engaging with the world in an ongoing process of becoming. We want to help our young people to be active, engaged citizens as opposed to passive disengaged people.

So what does this look like in a practical sense? What do we do when we work with children, youth or adults to enable this way of being in the world?

First and foremost, weening our young people on the arts, and high quality arts engagement, does this automatically. Through the process of becoming, I have simply come up with one perspective through which to look at what the arts do. So, one way of answering this question is to keep these “open system human” capacities in mind as we build meaningful, creative programming: Attention/questioning - reflection - expression. There is no one rule for dealing with these concepts, but it helps to ask what each one is composed of.

One way of considering “attention”, for example, is to break it into the senses through which we pay attention; keeping in mind that a child who is missing a sense, or has a less acute senses, often balances this out by having very finely tuned other senses. So, “attention” is made up of whatever senses an individual has available : sight, taste, smell, touch, or hearing. Coming up with activities and exercises that specifically addresses the senses is important.

The capacity to question can also be developed by making questions a central theme. In general by inviting them, and also by using questions in a variety of ways in the curriculum.

The capacity of reflection is also a capacity that can be thought of as being made of several components. I think of “reflection” as involving our imagination, our emotions, and our ability to conceive and to judge; but this is not to say this is the only way of thinking about it.



Creating with Children



Each of these components can be exercised and played with individually, and in relation to one another, in various ways through the curriculum.

And finally, “expression”: the tools and techniques we use to “express”. There are millions of tools and techniques that can be learned within all of the arts. The things you can do with those tools, the skills and techniques we apply, are endless; as they can constantly be re-invented and re-used in any way one can imagine. Young people should continuously be invited to engage with a wide variety of tools, and be reminded that there are some traditional methods for using those tools; but there are also no specific rules. The more ways we learn to use them, the more ways we have to communicate our observations, questions, and reflections. Throughout all of our tool explorations and discoveries, we can teach and learn from others.

We live in a highly visually based world, full of visual language, images, advertising, television, and the Internet. There is in-fact so much visual stimulation, that we simply can't pay attention to all of it. We learn to not give our full attention to the visual, and consideration of our other senses becomes even less important. Paying attention is a skill. It is something that has to be practiced, and we also have to learn how to be selective with what we give our full attention to, and what we do not. By exploring our capacity to “pay attention” with young people, how little attention is actually paid to their surroundings is quickly revealed. I used to change things around in the classroom to test their capacity to pay attention, and when I would do this (at first), the students would point out things about the room that had remained the same for years!

Celebration

The idea of “celebration” and the importance of celebration within the arts, is something I learned specifically from Vitek Wincza, through working with the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts. All programming there is set up based on “A,B,C”. A is “introduction” B is “development” and C is “celebration”. Within the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts, and consequently Culture for Kids in the Arts, we organize based on this structure, whether it's the curriculum, or the way we go about our jobs, or when structuring new programs and opportunities. The “C” is highly stressed. Within the performing arts there must actually be a performance through which we celebrate all that we have learned. Within the visual arts, there must be an exhibition of some kind. And of course, when the performance or exhibition is over, we celebrate with food, beverage, and by spending time with one another. Celebration can be taken up in many ways. A performance or exhibition is the big example or the “macro” level version of celebration. But we can celebrate at the end of a lesson by revisiting highlights of the day.

Sustainable Quality Arts Programming

CKA is committed to making the arts available for everyone, everyday, everywhere. This goal begins with you. It begins with the fact that you have read this little book, and with the fact that you decided that you want to know more about the arts; and why they are important for children, youth, and beyond. CKA is working towards strengthening our partnerships with our community partners so that when our artist instructors enter community sites around the city, our partners feel ready to receive the arts programming that we have to offer.

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Conclusion



“Feeling ready” means that the people who work on the ground with children and youth everyday understand that the arts are important; and are ready to work with us to provide positive environments where the children have the opportunity to do many types of activities. These include meaningful activities through visual arts, drama, music and dance; where they get to tap into their inner world, express their deep emotions and beliefs, and share these with others; so that we can all learn from one another and grow together as healthy, engaged citizens.

CKA is also building our capacity to offer professional development opportunities for those who wish to develop a deeper understanding of the arts in various ways: from learning how to do quick simple activities, or strengthening your own creative capacity to make and do.

For people who have a really strong interest, we will also be offering various levels of certification for those who desire to be Cultural Educators. This would enable you to build your capacity to involve arts and creativity within your own life, and to lead more complex activities with others in community settings.

We will also be building resources to support arts education, and will offer these through a website which will be a hub for resources and training/professional development.

For those who become Cultural Educators, we plan to maintain and build our mentorship with you. By encouraging ongoing, professional, development and feedback loop sessions where we participate with you in arts programming from time to time; so that your capacity as a cultural educator can continue to strengthen and evolve. We can continue to learn from one another, making Hamilton the best place not only to raise a child, but where everyone can connect and flourish.





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Biographies



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Vitek Wincza trained and performed as a ballet dancer in Poland and defected in 1981. He established the Hamilton Ballet School in 1987 and founded the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts in 1997. Vitek is the Founder and Artistic/Executive Director for Culture for Kids in the Arts, a registered charitable organization founded in 1999, committed to providing access to quality arts programming. In 2001, Vitek founded HCA Dance Theatre, a non-profit organization dedicated to producing and presenting new dance works for local audiences. Vitek has received the Cultural Merit Award, Government of Poland, 1996; Hamilton's Vision 2020, 1998; Honours from Moscow's Diaghilev Foundation, 2003; City of Hamilton Dance Award, 2004; WNED and Steuben, Canadian Artist Award in Buffalo, NY, 2004; City of Hamilton Community Arts Award, 2012; and was nominated as Hamilton's Citizen of the Year in 2013.

Renee Jackson is a visual artist and art educator from Hamilton, Ontario. She is an assistant professor at Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia. She served for seven years on the executive board of the Canadian Society for Education Through Art. As an educational consultant, she continues to work behind the scenes for CKA, and also develops resources and teaching aids for a variety of purposes, including video games.

Victoria Long-Wincza is a local visual artist, art educator and McMaster University Studio Art Alumni. Victoria is the Education and Program Manager for the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts and Culture for Kids in the Arts. From 1999 – 2010 she was part of the original education faculty supporting the HCA Children's Arts Exploration and CKA Mentorship programs, which together, introduced over 55,000 children from regional and local School Boards to the arts. Victoria has received a Hamilton Employer Champion Award, Industry Education Council of Hamilton (2010) and City of Hamilton Arts Education Award (2013).

WHY DOES ART EDUCATION MATTER?

Notes



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