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A handbook for the middle school art teacher: teaching art to the transitional adolescent

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A HANDBOOK FOR
THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ART TEACHER:
TEACHING ART TO THE
TRANSITIONAL ADOLESCENT

MASTER'S PROJECT

by
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JULY, 1991

Approved by:

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the official advisor.

Official Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

How well are our middle schools meeting the needs of the transescent, or transitional adolescent? Transescent adolescent is the term used to describe the unstable, transitional stage of early adolescent development. Literature suggests that there is a gap between the middle school concept and the reality of its implementation. Today's adolescent has to deal with more pressure and stress than ever before. Parent and child relationships, career choices, school related problems, peer pressure, drinking, drugs, sexual activity, and coping with biological changes are just some of the influences that have impacted upon an adolescent's life in the nineties.

Traditional sources of stability such as family, the church, the legal system, and even the prospects for eventual employment, are rapidly shifting. The only certainty is uncertainty. (Lounsbury 1990, p.66).

Middle schools are beginning to change as they respond to the new and old challenges of meeting adolescent needs in today's society. New research and knowledge of the transitional adolescent has caused educators to take a second look at our current middle school concept, and redefine it to better suite the needs of our youth.

Educational leader Alfred Arth (1990) believes that the middle school should be a special place that treats the learning of subject and the learning of self with equal

value and respect. Arth stresses the crucial importance of middle school age development as it effects a youth's future capacity to learn. Arth (1990, p. 106) states that,

the zest for life that forms the intellectual basis for being can be established only at that time when the quest for initial information outside of the self is strongest-- during the middle years.

The current middle school concept is based on known facts of adolescent development and the principles of learning. Donald Eichhorn (1966), the first major implementor of the middle school concept defined the transescent stage as:

the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age in human development, the transescent designation is based on the many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes in the body chemistry that appear prior to the time which the body gains a practical degree of stabilization over these complex pubescent changes.

The middle school student is neither a child nor an adolescent, but rather a young person in transition. Parents and educators don't seem to understand the real trauma that transescents go through as they develop. Biological changes, peer pressure, uncertainty of the unknown, and stresses of home life are just a few of the pressures on our youth. The transescent adolescent needs adult guidance and support to help them cope with this confusing and unstable period of life. Caring is critical to their development.

The art room is one area that offers a unique environment for the adolescent middle schooler. Here there is more opportunity for interaction and communication between pupil and teacher so that a close relationship may develop. The art curriculum provides for diverse achievement levels as well as diverse learning and thinking styles common to this age group. Learning through exploration is essential for effective learning at this age level due to varied mental development. Becoming cultured through the arts builds self esteem and provides a successful exploratory experience for the transescent.

Review of the Literature

Two critical pieces of literature presenting the problems facing our Middle Schools are, Turning Points: Preparing American Youth For the 21st. Century: The Report of the Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents, Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, (1989), and the text by John Lounsbury, Perspectives: Middle School Education, 1964-1984, (1984).

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to design a handbook that would help the new or experienced middle school teacher to understand, and be sympathetic to the physical, emotional and intellectual development occurring in their students at

this age level. The handbook also presents approaches to teaching art that are appropriate to the middle level.

Procedure

- Subject. This handbook was written for the sixth, seventh and eighth grade art teacher.
- Setting. The setting for the handbook was a middle school, grades six through eight.
- Format. This handbook presents information pertaining to the physical, intellectual and emotional development of the middle school student. Guidelines and suggestions for teaching art at the middle level are given, that are sensitive to the needs of the transescent adolescent.

Conclusion

The result of this study is a handbook for teaching art to the middle school, transescent adolescent.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of the literature, pertaining to the current middle school status, explains the middle school concept and the current recommendations for change to better meet the needs of the transitional adolescent. Aspects of the physical, emotional and intellectual development of the middle school child, as well as parental feelings toward their adolescent and the teacher's role will be discussed.

The current middle school concept is based on known facts of adolescent development and the principles of learning. The middle school philosophy strives to address the needs of transescents, utilize team teaching, planning, and provide a smooth transition from the elementary school to the high school. How effective schools are in fulfilling these philosophies varies, and the literature suggests that we have a ways to go in removing the gap between the concept and the reality of it's implementation. Problems exist and must be addressed if the middle school concept is to be effective in helping transescents to pass through this critical stage of development. The reform process is currently underway in many middle schools across the country.

The amount of literature pertaining to the needed reform at the middle school level is considerable and recommendations have become redundant. Teachers, with the support and involvement of their principals, have the power to improve upon the quality of their student's lives at this overlooked stage of their development.

The recommendations at the middle level evolve around the special needs of this age group. Middle school expert John Lounsbury suggests that we get students more actively involved in learning, free our course of studies from developmentally inappropriate requirements, give middle schoolers more legitimate interaction time, become facilitators of knowledge through which youngsters can develop critical thinking skills, increase the relevance of our course content and raise expectations of students as to what school can be, schedule teachers with common planning periods to further interdisciplinary instruction, reduce homogeneous grouping, create teacher advisory programs, and lastly, recognize the ultimate importance of the teacher's power to be a person to their students and not just a passer of knowledge. (Lounsbury, 1990)

A salient goal of the current reformation at the middle school level is that of serving diversity. Diversity is a word that typifies our American Democracy. It also typifies the communities and schools our students attend. Diverse is an especially appropriate word to describe the transescent adolescent. The middle level student ranges

between the ages of eleven to fourteen. At no other age level does one see such diversity in physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

Educational expert Glenn Maynard (1986, p. 21) stated that:

Diversity, not uniformity, is the rule rather than the exception at the middle level. Building respect for the core value of diversity should be a prime motivation and consideration in determining the instructional program as well as the governance of the school/classroom and the activities of the middle level school.

Puberty dramatically alters the transescent's life. The most obvious changes which occur at this time are physical. For this reason, bodily changes have come to the forefront of the middle school movement.

Transescent's begin rapid physical development at varied ages and so diverse stages of maturity and immaturity are common. Uneven development of muscles and bones, resulting in a lack of coordination or awkwardness, is also a common physical factor. Girls tend to grow taller in grade seven, reaching their adult height by the end of grade eight. Males have generally surpassed the female in height by the end of grade eight. They average four point one inches of growth in this year alone. (Lounsbury 1990, . p.6)

Expert Strang stated in 1957 that,

Facts about physical growth preceding and following puberty are important for a number of reasons. Bodily changes, especially if sudden, change the adolescent's body image and self-concept; he may now see himself as an adult with adult privileges and responsibilities. Biological changes give rise to physical sensations; these are translated into emotional

states, which, in turn, may be expressed in social behavior. Slow or rapid growth, unevenness of growth, or abnormalities of growth may affect an adolescent's total development.

The result of studies has indicated that biological maturation has a considerable impact on an adolescent's ability to learn. Social and emotional development problems can arise as the body matures and the youngster becomes anxious and sensitive to the changes that are occurring, or are late in occurring. The major outcome of research on physical maturation is the idea of the home-based advisor program that would help transescents to understand and cope with these changes.

Transescents experience a wide range of cognitive abilities, from pre-operational to concrete, to abstract thinking. Brain growth occurs at stages and at different times. Formal thinking skills evolve between the ages of twelve to fourteen.

The wisdom of cognitive developmental psychology is that persons are 'evolving selves' (Kegan 1982) who make sense of the world around them in wholly different ways as they move forward through sequential stages of being. Piaget (1936) and Kohlberg (1969) have taught us the most about this progression and clarified the nature and consequence of the constant dialogue occurring between individuals and their environment. The work of both enables us to assert with reasonable confidence that adolescents are at a developmental crest where they face an extraordinary leap to a more comprehensive, complex and ethical way of being-in-the-world. It is a leap from the concrete to an abstract way of thinking. (Parker 1985, p. 254)

For years it was assumed that the middle schooler could think abstractly. The psychologist, Epstein (1980)

has discovered that some can, but many cannot. He surmised that,

seventy-six percent of children will sit through three consecutive years of being unable to handle material presented at the level of formal reasoning. It is known that most of the material prepared for the junior high schools used the level of formal reasoning.

There is also a wide range of mental development occurring between the ages of ten to fourteen. Researchers have discovered that brain growth reaches plateau periods. During these plateau periods, it is believed that students can learn but not take in higher order thinking skills than a growth stage can tolerate.

Teachers, therefore, should utilize skills and levels already achieved, teach skills and processes in addition to content, drop back to the concrete when abstract ideas are not understood, teach new facts and new information within the thinking skills initiated by the end of the ten to twelve growth period, devote class time to skill development and self-concept, and provide teaching strategies that actively involve students in the learning process.

(Merenbloom 1986, p.8)

The middle school curriculum must be revised to provide for diverse achievement levels as well as diverse learning and thinking styles. Structured, sequential learning, with an emphasis on learning through exploration, are the most fitting modes of teaching to the transescent adolescent.

Parents and educators don't seem to understand the real trauma that transescents go through as they develop. Biological changes, peer pressure, uncertainty of the unknown, and stresses of home life are just a few of the pressures on our youth.

The peer group is very important in early adolescence. Pressure exists to conform to the group's norms. The peer group covers up feelings of inadequacy and compensates for attention the adolescent has forfeited from parents en route to independence. Although the adolescent yearns to be independent, he is still very dependent on adults for approval and values.

Socially, a middle schooler struggles between peers and the family for role models. They may or may not have an interest in dating or socializing with the opposite sex. Socializing is extremely important to the middle school child and legitimate time needs to be scheduled for interaction with peers during the school day.

A student entering middle school needs to be provided with as much security as possible, for the transition to the middle school will bear upon the future success of the student at the middle level.

For most middle school students, the shift to the middle level is anxiety-ridden. Evidence strongly suggests that confusion and disorientation are common feelings for these youth. A study done by Alfred Arth identified transescent's most common fears as: failure, drugs, being picked on, being sent to the office, keeping up with assignments, unkind people, and giving a presentation in front of the class. (Arth 1990)

As middle school expert John Lounsbury (1990, p. 65) states,

despite it's critical importance, Americans are rather ignorant concerning youth between the ages of approximately ten to fifteen.

With ignorance comes negative feelings as parents may be misinterpreting their adolescent's behavior. Living with a teenage son or daughter on a daily basis, often makes parents feel anxious, angry, uncertain or unfit.

Parents of transescents range in age between thirty and forty-five. This can be an unstable period of their lives for many are experiencing divorce or job changes. No less stressful is the adjustment their child endures in a new school situation. Parents are making stressful changes in their lives at the same time that their adolescent child is in emotional, physical and intellectual transition. Many parents tend to disengage from their adolescent as he or she seeks their independence, when in fact they should be communicating more closely.

Another problem facing the transescent is that parents may view their involvement in their child's education as unnecessary. The child seeks a new independence from parents, however, he never desires a complete break. Family support is still very important to the transescent and parents need to stay involved. Middle schoolers needs affection and attention from parents just as they did when they were younger.

Society's problems are becoming students' problems. Substance abuse is occurring at an alarming rate. Packard reported that, "the average age of a child taking his/her

first drink of alcohol is now twelve years." (Packard 1983, p. 6)

The document Turning Points (1989), estimates that one in four adolescents is vulnerable to at-risk behaviors and school failure. More and more young adolescents are becoming sexually active, and subsequently pregnant at earlier ages. The break-up of the American family, or the absentee parent, due to work or substance abuse, is handicapping our youth's ability to learn and grow into self-actualized adults.

The psychologist David Elkind (1981) has written a wonderfully informative book entitled The Hurried Child, Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon. This book takes a realistic view of the stresses and pressures we put on our children. Elkind's point is that if we hurry our children's development, important lessons of responsibility and values are not learned. Consequently, our youth have gaps or holes in their development or value system. This results in children not understanding the consequences of certain behaviors.

The youth who is home alone after school until parents return home from work is one example Elkind cites. He is forced to behave and be responsible in ways he may be incapable of. We are putting stress on our children just as we are stressed to the limits with work and family.

Another problem facing middle schools is staffing. Many middle school teachers dislike their work. Assignment

to the middle school grades is usually a teacher's last choice.

For some this feeling comes from the structure of the middle grade schools. Like the students, they feel overwhelmed by the impersonality of the environment, and they feel ineffective with the large number of students they must teach." (Turning Points 1989, p. 58)

Far too many teachers and professionals are simply unprepared for the task of understanding and educating early adolescents. A large majority of today's middle school personnel hold secondary certificates with an emphasis on a subject area, or elementary certificates with an emphasis on teaching young children.

This dilemma has created, or at least perpetuated, one of the most serious problems in middle school education - that of making the middle level schools miniature versions of high schools or extensions of elementary schools." (Lounsbury 1984, p. 111)

John Lounsbury's text, Perspectives (1984), contributes additional factors to a disinterest in teaching at the middle level.

- 1) a popular tradition about the appeal of working with young children.
- 2) interest in teaching a particular subject in depth.
- 3) lack of understanding of the goals and functions of middle level schooling.
- 4) lack of knowledge regarding early adolescents which at times verges on fear and dislike. (Howard and Stoumbis, 1970)

Educators can no longer do what we currently do and meet the needs of the transescent of the nineties.

At this age of heightened curiosity and genuine eagerness to understand life in all of it's

manifestations, schools too often restrict their learning activities to text-books focussed on the past, when adolescents live very much in the present. (Lounsbury 1984, p. 66).

George Bernard Shaw could not have been more correct in his belief that the ideal situation is a child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child. Making course work more relevant and being more creative with exploratory learning styles are two important recommendations made by middle school experts.

Middle level education will not be fully realized until our administrators and teachers are properly prepared to meet the challenges of an effective middle school curriculum.

The transescent adolescent needs adult guidance and support to help him cope with this confusing and unstable period of life. Caring is vital to their development. Hopefully, the current reform movement underway can gain momentum from caring educators so that this age group can flourish during these years of transition.

Most adults are not interested in repeating the adolescent experience: a time of maturing physical development; a time when thinking capabilities move from the concrete to the abstract, when decisions begin to be based on shades of gray rather than black-and-white: a time of insecurity and fear, as well as optimism and hope. (Meyers 1985, p.251)

As educators, we need to remember that our treatment of our students has long-term effects of a positive or negative nature.

CHAPTER III

A HANDBOOK FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ART TEACHER: TEACHING ART
TO THE TRANSITIONAL ADOLESCENT

This handbook was written for the new or experienced middle school art teacher. It will describe the characteristics of the middle school learner, the current recommendations to improve our middle schools to better meet the needs of the early adolescent learner, identify the art teacher's role in addressing the needs of the transescent adolescent, and discuss useful instructional techniques for developing the transescent's self-concept.

The Middle School Concept

Middle school is the middle stage of public education, labelled the transescent or transitional period. The middle school concept has not changed much over the last eighty or so years. The philosophy strives to:

- 1) address the needs of early adolescents.
- 2) utilize team teaching and planning.
- 3) provide for pupil interest and ability.
- 4) provide a smooth transition from the elementary school and to the high school.

Our middle schools have not built into their curriculum a means for addressing the psychological and ever changing

social needs of our transescent adolescent's development. Consequently, there is a gap between the concept and the reality of it's implementation.

Middle schools are beginning to change as they respond to the new and old challenges of being an adolescent in today's society. New research and knowledge of the transitional adolescent has caused educators to take a second look at our current middle school concept, and redefine it to better meet the needs of the transescent.

Many educators believe that middle schools have been virtually ignored when it comes to discussing educational reform, yet they are handling students at a most pivotal and crucial stage of development. The problem is a mismatch between the curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual, emotional and interpersonal needs of adolescents.

For most students, the shift to the middle school is anxiety ridden. In the new setting, students can change classroom situations and teachers six or more times a day. This can inhibit close, supportive relationships with staff members. Young people have the opportunity to, and indeed do, get lost in the shuffle of large impersonal settings, at an age when they need intimacy and stability.

Middle school teaches need special training to work with this age group. The program QUEST, a skill and self-esteem development program for adolescents, involves a commitment from administrators and staff members. It is a

positive step being taken by many educators to fill the gap between the concept and reality of our middle grade schools.

Adolescents need adult guidance to help them cope with this confusing and unstable period of their life. Caring is crucial to their development into adults.

Transescent adolescents need to feel they are important members of a group. They need great amounts of positive reinforcement. They also need to be taught social skills that will enable them to live harmoniously with society. The schools have no choice but to partake in addressing the middle school child at this important moment in educational history, when it is middle schoolers turn to be in the forefront of change.

Recommendations for Changes at the Middle Level

The current recommendations for change at the middle level directly relate to the needs of the transitional adolescent. Middle school expert Alfred Arth (1990) believes that the middle school should treat the learning of subject and the learning of self with equal value and respect. He stresses the crucial importance of middle school age development as it affects a student's future capacity to learn.

Serving Diversity

The diversity of the transescent adolescent's social, emotional and intellectual development is extreme in the middle years.

Though they all go through the 'perils of puberty' they start at different times and proceed at greatly varying rates. One seventh grade girl may still play with dolls while another is a mother. One boy may be under five feet tall while a classmate has already risen beyond six feet in height. (Lounsbury 1990, p. 64)

Recommondations for Change

John Lounsbury has been the key figure in the study of the middle school child. His recommendations for change provide a clear direction for our middle schools. The following list provides a condensed version of the recommondations from his book,

Inside Grade Eight: From Apathy to Excitement, (1990).

- 1) Programs for students that are developmentally appropriate. (Students need to be more actively involved in learning at this age.)
- 2) Middle level schools should be freed from developmentally inappropriate requirements.
- 3) Social interaction time needs to be scheduled into their day.
- 4) Developing critical thinking skills should be a priority goal.
- 5) Increase the relevant content component in the curriculum.
- 6) Interdisciplinary instruction must be pursued.
- 7) Reduce the use of homogeneous grouping.
- 8) Teacher advisory or advisee-adviser programs should be more fully implemented.
- 9) The expectations of students, relative to what

school could be, must be raised.

- 10) Recognize the ultimate importance of the teacher as a caring individual, knowledgeable of the needs of the transescent adolescent.

Characteristics of the Transescent Adolescent

A Turning Point

In nineteen-eighty-nine, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development released a report entitled Turning Points: Preparing Our Youth For The Twenty-First Century. The report is comprised of important information on what many consider to be the most difficult and pivotal stage of development, early adolescence.

Early adolescence is an agonizing transition from childhood to adulthood. The period of transition may last from two to four years. It is a time of self-doubt and inconsistent behavior. Behavioral characteristics between the ages of students varies greatly from apathy and fatigue to spurts of released emotional and physical energy.

In addition to experiencing bodily changes which affect their emotional states, adolescents face many decisions concerning their values and lifestyles, decisions which can affect them for a lifetime. The transitional adolescent does indeed face many turning points. Teachers who are knowledgeable of the changes and states of their transescent students can be more effective in helping them to learn, by easing the stresses they face each day.

It is of critical importance that the middle school teacher enjoys, and cares about the transescent adolescent. Far too many middle school teachers and professionals are unprepared for the task of understanding and educating this age group. Many are high school or elementary level educators that have ended up at the middle school. Professional training and awareness is needed for any professional who will be in contact with the middle school youth.

Biological Changes

John Lounsbury defines the transescent stage as the time before the onset of puberty that extends through the early stages of adolescence. It is an unstable period due to the chemistry changes affecting the physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of the transescent's being.

The transescent student ranges in age from eleven to fourteen. He is neither a child nor an adolescent, but rather a young person in transition. By ninth grade, the student is in a slower, more stable stage of adolescence.

Physical Changes

Physical changes are the most obvious changes the transescent faces and for this reason they have come to the forefront of the middle school reform movement. These changes have a considerable effect on a transescent's ability to learn, as well as influencing self-concept.

Emotional states influence social behavior and are directly related to bodily changes.

Transescents are well aware of the dramatic changes occurring in their lives. It is painfully obvious which students may have benefited from an additional year at home before starting school as these younger students are socially and physically behind the majority of students. Other students are just late bloomers. This can affect their self-concept and confidence in a negative manner.

Uneven development of muscles and bones, resulting in a lack of coordination or awkwardness is a common physical factor as well.

Any experienced middle school teacher will attest to the middle school as being a noisy and active environment. The rapid growth occurring in the transescent manifests itself in a need to release physical energy. Teachers need to be aware of this and should plan lessons or breaks accordingly.

By the end of grade six, both males and females are beginning to show signs of physical change. In grade seven, the female is ahead of the male in growth, and is usually taller and more developed than the seventh grade boy. By the end of eighth grade, the females have reached their adult height and the males have grown an average of four inches.

The development of the males is the most dramatic the second half of the eighth grade. Although muscle

development is far from complete, long, lanky legs are common as bone growth is rapid and dramatic.

Self-concept

The adolescent's self-concept changes, as he may see himself as mature, and worthy of adult privileges and responsibilities.

The eighth grade student is most frequently fourteen, and expects more adult-like treatment. Discipline challenges are more common with the eighth grade student as they are feeling their new wings and questioning authority.

Cognitive Abilities

Transescents experience a wide range of cognitive abilities, from pre-operational to abstract thinking. They are on a developmental crest, in many ways, but especially in the area of abstract or formal thinking skills.

For years educators assumed that the middle schooler could think abstractly. It has been discovered that some can, but many cannot. So the need to review our material and how we present it is critical to better learning and interest in the classroom. Structured, sequential learning, with an emphasis on learning through exploration, is a more fitting mode of effectively teaching the transescent adolescent. The art room offers the perfect, exploratory, hands-on learning experience for the middle schooler.

Social Interaction

Social interaction with peers is a salient interest for the middle school student. Note passing is an all too common sight for the middle school teacher. Legitimate interaction time with peers needs to be scheduled into the school day to satisfy this need.

The peer group is becoming a strong force in the transescent's life as he breaks parental ties. Pressure exists to conform to the group's norms.

How one dresses is extremely vital to being a part of a group. The athletic shoe industry and the fashion industry are making large profits from their sales to the middle school aged child. At this age, appearance and status are important for they provide an image and facade for the transescent's evolving sense of self.

Black T-shirts with advertisements of rebellious, hard-rock bands are popular with the students who will tend to look to drugs or "being cool". What they are yearning for, in some cases, is adult-like treatment, and so they latch on to adult-like images through their dress. The clothing they wear reflects the values of the people who wear them. In any group, conforming covers up feelings of inadequacy during an unstable period, in which students are grappling for their value system.

It is important for teachers to be aware of a student who may seem unhappy, and report them to the appropriate personnel. This is the time in their life that home or

school related problems need addressing for it may be too late for change once value choices have been made. A teachers concern can make all the difference.

Parental Ties

The transitional adolescent is struggling to be independent from parental ties as the peer group becomes the source for role models, however, he still desires parental support, love and affection. Parents are generally uninformed of what their adolescent is going through at this transitional stage of development. Anger, anxiety and impatience are common parental feelings.

A parent may choose to disengage from their adolescent as they feel stress in dealing with them in addition to sensing the transescent's need to detatch.

Parents need to communicate and show affection to their child to maintain stability in their lives.

Parents of transescents can be at an unstable period of their lives as well. Most middle school parents range in age from thirty to forty-five. This is a time in which many are experiencing job changes and divorce. Many of our problem students have parents with substance abuse problems or schedules that do not include time with their children.

Societal Pressures

If the pressure and stress of physical and emotional changes were not enough, the transescent must also face the pressures of sex and drugs. The break -up of the American family, or the absentee parent are also handicapping our young people.

Our youth are as stressed out as their parents. Youngsters are expected to perform and take on responsibilities because parents cannot be there. Too many children are left to fend for themselves, without the emotional support and quidance of an adult. This has resulted in holes or gaps in our youth's value system.

Parents are not the only ones to blame for the difficulties and stresses our youth endure. The media is pushing expectations and behaviors on adolescents as well. The schools have no other choice but to take on some of these factos influencing our student's lives.

The Goals of Art Education

The goals of art education follow the goals of education in general. They are:

- 1) personal fulfillment through art.
- 2) developing an awareness of artistic heritage.
- 3) developing an awareness of art in society.

Most importantly, our programs goals should develop and nurture a positive self-concept in the art room, through a

stimulating, exploratory, learning environment in which students learn to create and respond to art, providing them with an enriched vision of our world.

Art at the Middle Level

Art educator Laura Chapman (1978, p. 203) wrote that:

While art offers no panacea for the many and varied problems of growing up, it is one of the few subjects in which students can be actively encouraged to clarify and express their own feelings, thoughts and perceptions. The challenge in teaching early adolescents is to accommodate their urgent desire to be grown up while accounting for the fact that their growth is far from complete.

A Disciplined Approach to Art

The hard work and persistent efforts of dedicated art educators has infiltrated our college courses. Our teachers are now trained to teach with more discipline and content. Our students are reaping the benefits of a more meaningful art curriculum.

Discipline-based art education is a program funded by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, which is in part responsible for the great progress that has been made in developing the content of the art curriculum.

This program is being used by many public schools, as well as being taught to art educators in most university art education programs.

Discipline-based art education teaches art content sequentially, through four disciplines: art history, art production, art criticism and aesthetics. Most art curriculums are based on these four disciplines. The results are the same, middle school students with an understanding of the arts and an enculturally enriched self-concept.

The DBAE program is worthy of an art teachers inspection, however, there must be a district wide commitment from the art teacher to the superintendent. The art teacher and building principal must attend a three week workshop in the summer to begin the multi-year process of implementing the DBAE program.

The advantage to becoming discipline-based through district wide implementation is that your district's art department could be eligible for grant money from the Getty Foundation. It is also an opportunity for you to increase art awareness, and the importance of art in the curriculum, through the entire district.

Today's art educator is taught to teach, and their course of studies require them to teach, the discipline-based approach, without going through the training program. However, the program is worthy of investigation. Many art educators find the DBAE program to be too disciplined, as testing and worksheets are suggested as in other disciplines.

Personal Fullfillment Through Expression

A child's self-concept, his perception of who he is and what he is made of, can be enhanced through a positive experience in expressing his feelings or ideas through a created project based on the study of an artist or art style from a period of history.

A few years ago, art class was considered a mental health activity. Creating for personal fulfillment was the main goal of the art program. The goal of teaching art in today's classroom is to give students an interest and knowledge of art that will live beyond the created project they take home.

The creation of the project is more important to the students than the knowledge they will gain for they are full of energy and eager to get their hands into something. They soon begin to appreciate the content of what is taught as they see studied works of arts in museums, magazines, in doctors offices and on the television.

Artistic Heritage

The study of artistic heritage builds student's confidence of how art has reflected or been influenced by historic events in our world. Art students understand the changes art has taken through history and what factors have affected different art styles throughout history.

The artistic heritage of America can be made relevant to their lives through the study of Pop Art and Optical Art. Student's fashions currently reflect a rebirth of florescent colors and optical patterns of the nineteen sixties Pop Art and Optical Art movements. Students learn that optical art derived in part from the experimentation with hallucinagenic drugs which were infiltrating parts of American society at the time.

Middle schoolers, especially seventh and eighth graders, are very interested in the music and fads of the sixties, which many of their parents first encountered. It is important that student's see the relationship of art and the history of a particular country or culture.

Art in Society

Art is everywhere in society. Students are eager to understand the art they see around them in professional buildings, museums and shopping malls. Their fashions may reflect the splatter painting of the Abstract Expressionists, the florescent colors from the Pop Art movement of the nineteen sixties, which are currently experiencing a rebirth. The art of Henri Matisse is used as a backdrop behind the show's host of Music Television Vidios or M.T.V. Loreal hair products use the painting designs of Piet Mondrian on the packaging of their products. One student was delighted to report that Piet Mondrion, an artist studied in art class, was used by a

clothes designer to design his dresses. The student had seen the designer's fashions on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Mad Magazine and The Garbage Pail Kid Cards take artist like Grant Wood and Michelangelo and change their works to be humourous or gorey. These examples reflect how art is threaded through our society for the purpose of selling products, as well as appreciating art. The middle schooler delights in identifying the artists being represented in the products or artworks.

Artists may reflect a current issue facing the nation or a human emotion or we can all identify with. Students see how artist reflect what is happening in their society and realize the purpose of art in a culture. Students are excited to understand and detect things around them pertaining to art which they may have had no knowledge of previously. They will bring in articles or relate stories of seeing a studied artist featured in a magazine, on the television, or talked about in another unrelated class. This makes our teaching efforts all worth while and addresses a recomondation for improving the relevance of art to the middle schoolers life.

Students' comments assure us that we are meeting our objectives. The middle school student is beaming with pride and pleasure as he has the understanding and confidence to be a part of the art world.

Fifteen years ago, we were not teaching students about artists and styles of art through the creation of their

studio products. Today, we can see how greatly enhanced esteem can be from acquired art knowledge. These students not only have experiences outside of the classroom, in which they are recognizing artist studied in class, but they are also learning that people who can appreciate culture and the arts, are special.

Characteristics of the Middle School Learner

Diversity Amongst Grade Levels

Diversity is a most appropriate word to use in describing the middle school student. There are little similarities in comparing a sixth, seventh and eighth grader. The physical, emotional and cognitive levels of growth are extreme from one year to the next. This certainly has an effect on the personality and learning style of these different grades.

Middle schools consist of a variety of grade groupings and no one grouping has been decided upon as the most appropriate. A middle school may be grades five and six, seven and eight, or grades six through eight. More and more research is coming out on what grade groupings would cause the least anxiety for the students. An eighth grader sharing a hall with a sixth grader can be a very intimidating experience for the sixth grader.

Diverse Learning Styles

Diversity among learning styles in grades six through eight are dramatic as well.

The sixth grade learner is very enthusiastic and eager. Grade seven brings a more coordinated and mature student to the art room with an eagerness to learn and cooperate. The seventh grader is becoming more concerned with his peer's perception of him, however, he is not afraid to appear interested in what is being taught.

The eighth grader is concerned with being grown-up and indifferent to adults. He expects more adult-like treatment. They can appear to be apathetic and disinterested when in fact they may be very interested in what you are saying. To appear excited and intrigued is not considered "cool" or acceptable and so teachers of this age need to be open to experimenting with new approaches of relating to the eighth grader. Their apathy and care-less attitude is not necessarily a reflection of your teaching, but could be attributed to their stage of development.

The analogy of students sitting indian style on the floor in front of the board to look at and discuss selected works of art is a perfect example of the differences in behavior among middle schoolers grades six through eight.

Sixth graders, when asked to come forward, run up to the board to sit and listen to what you have to say. They are very willing and eager to listen and share their thoughts.

Seventh graders are a little more hesitant when asked to come forward, but are interested and cooperative and will come and sit on the floor.

Eighth graders, on the other hand, are insulted that you would ask them to sit on the floor. They believe sitting on the floor is childish and yearn for more adult-like treatment. They may appear apathetic and disinterested, but this behavior can be common to this age group. If the teacher is enthusiastic and interested in the subject at hand, the eighth grader too will gain interest and enthusiasm. Very few will approach the board closer than ten feet or more without continual coaxing. They keep their distance so as not to appear too eager to learn.

The eighth grader, though more concerned with being respected as a more mature person, needs to know that you realize he is not yet an adult, and so rules will be imposed to ensure effective learning and safety. In a time when our youth are stressed to the limit with adult choices and responsibilities, they seem to appreciate your acknowledgement of the child that is still a part of them.

The Child With a Learning Disability

Most special education teachers will tell you that the child with a learning disability has special talent in the area of art. You will most likely find this to be true. Approximately five percent of your students will be

learning disabled. Behaviorly, this child may offer you some challenges that need explaining.

A child with a learning disability has a malfunction in the impulses that move along the nerves. The problem is with the receptive system: the ears and the eyes, the processes that store the input in the memory, or the output from the memory, which is the written or oral expression.

This child is usually above average in intelligence, and may excel in one subject and do poorly in another. What you need to understand is that this child will learn differently, and may need special attention from you.

A learning disabled child would most probably be identified by the middle grades, however, he may not have been. Here are some behaviors you can identify with the learning disabled child.

- 1) Hyperactivity
- 2) Perceptual motor impairments
- 3) Emotional problems (passive or angry)
- 4) Cannot understand orientation with space (above below, in front, behind)
- 5) Distractability (attention deficit)
- 6) Impulsivity without thought of consequences
- 7) Memory and thinking disorders
- 8) Specific reading disabilities
- 9) Speech or hearing disorders

The Learning Disabled Child and Artistic Expression

The learning disabled child has strengths in the area of art, and he is predominately right brain dominant. Undocumented figures and scientific studies support a correlation between right brain dominance and creativity.

The right brain is more synthetic and creative, whereas, the left brain is more linear and analytical. At one art college, the percentage of learning disabled students was guessed to be twenty-eight percent, leading one to believe that art is an area in which the child with a learning disability could experience success and a possible future.

Understanding the Child with a Learning Disability

All teachers, no matter what area, should be aware of the learning disabled in their classes. These students are most likely your behavior problems. Frustration resulting from an inability to process your task or instructions, or negative attention getting behavior due to a low self-esteem are just a few of the reasons you may find a behavioral problem to be a learning disabled student.

It is important that you realize that these problems can be lessened if the teacher is aware that the child has a learning disability. Communicating with the child privately, or with the special education teacher may be helpful and develops a rapport with the student.

The learning disabled student generally responds very positively to your caring approach and may feel relief that

he does not have to hide his disability from you. The learning disabled student is indeed handicapped, but there are no visible signs.

A typical unfortunate situation would be a learning disabled student being called upon to answer a question when they may be having difficulty processing the information you have just given. You may accuse the student of not paying attention when in fact he is experiencing confusion and frustration. Students may laugh or tease the learning disabled student for not knowing the answer, thus contributing to a long line of negative experiences with teachers and classroom situations that reinforces a poor self-concept.

Self-Concept and the Learning Disabled Student

The learning disabled youth generally has a poor self-concept . They know they are different. Classmates may tease them, calling them "dumb" or "stupid" because they cannot learn in the same way that the majority of the students do.

What all teachers need to understand is that school in general can be a horrifying, frustrating experience for the learning disabled student. We need to help them in every way possible.

The learning disabled student is yearning and in great need of praise. The art instructor can do much to raise the level of self-concept while in art class. Many

learning disabled have an uninhibited, expressive approach to their art projects so this may be their only class in which they can excel above their classmates.

Know who your learning disabled students are. Praise and encourage them at every opportunity. They are in great need of it and it will do much to improve their behavior and attention in class.

Writting Assignments and the Learning Disabled

Every teacher should be aware of the children who are special learners in their class. Any written art report or reading assignment could pose great difficulty and frustration for the learning disabled child. It is in the child's best interest that he be approached and relieved of doing the written assignment in the manner in which the other students have been instructed. It may take them four times as to write a paragraph. Possibly an oral report could replace the written assignment. Working with their special education tutors or teachers may help you to fit the assignment to the child's capabilities.

A Successful Approach to Teaching at the Middle Level

This handbook has discussed information on the middle school concept and the middle school child in an effort to heighten the awareness of the new middle school art instructor on the importance of being caring and

knowledgeable of the nature of the students you teach each day.

The remainder of this handbook will present an approach to art you may find useful.

It is important as a middle school teacher that you remember to:

- 1) Relate what you teach to the students lives.
Reinforce how art is relevant to their lives.
- 2) Be a caring adult role model and not just a passer of knowledge.
- 3) Use every opportunity possible to give positive reinforcement to build student's self-esteem.
Remind students that they are special because they are becoming culturally enriched, and able to partake in enjoying and understanding the purpose of art in our world.
- 4) Develop projects that are exploratory in nature and encourage students to find their own solutions.
Exploratory learning is the most appropriate mode of learning at this age level due to the diverse and unstable development occurring. Art offers a creative means of exploring through the study of artists and styles of art. Students find their own solutions to their created project by analyzing and interpreting concepts relating to an artist or style of art.

Integrating Your Beliefs and Philosophies

The most challenging problem an artist faces is what to paint and how to paint it. What are you trying to say through your art? Will your art work be realistic, surrealistic, abstract or a combination? What feelings are you trying to communicate?

As a teacher, you face a similar question. What do you really want to give to your students above and beyond the

art curriculum? What part of yourself and your beliefs can you give them that will leave a lasting impression?

Although art offers students the opportunity to express and develop their creative abilities, it also has the function of teaching them how to look at art and contemplate its purpose or meaning beyond the art room.

You cannot develop students interest in art with out developing their knowledge of the principles and elements of art and how artists use them to express ideas.

Art is usually not required beyond the middle years so this could be the last art instruction many will ever receive. Most of our students will not go on to be artists but all will be consumers of art. Our students will most likely ignore the arts if they have not acquired a basis for understanding them. This situation is less common today as a result of our improved art curriculum. Most elementary students come to the middle school with the knowledge of many artists and styles of art.

An Art Teacher Should be an Artist

It is difficult to imagine how an art teacher could be effective in teaching art if they were not an artist themself. It is my belief that an art teacher is going to be a more successful teacher if they are a working artist, dedicated and committed to exploring their creative abilities, with a true feeling for what being an artist is all about.

How can one teach students what constitutes successful art, as well as teach students how to create successful works of art, if they lack knowledge and ability themselves. The art work of student's is only as good as the abilities of the art teacher, for if he does not know how to use the principles of design effectively, neither will he be able to teach others.

The working artist/teacher emulates a confidence, enthusiasm, and experince as an artist , that enables the students to better understand what being an artist means. Sharing your artwork with your students is fascinating to them and increases their interest and respect of you.

Integrating your Interests

Art teachers should develop individual methods and approaches to art based on their individual personalitiy and interests. The art curriculum leaves us with the freedom to give of ourselves, which can leave a lasting impression of knowledge on our students because of the interest and enthusiasm we have for art.

If you have lived in Egypt and have artifacts, visuals and personal experiences to share, make this an emphasis of study with your students. If the Renaissance was the emphasis of your collegiate studies, develop your program with an emphasis on the Renaissance.

It is also important for you to meet with instructors from other subject areas and correlate the study of art

with an area students will be studying. Contacting the the social studies teacher at the beginning of the year, to schedule when students will be involved with units you could correlate a study of art with, produces marvelous learning results.

Your students will gain more from you if you are teaching them topics that you have enthusiasm and a personal interest in.

Using Evaluative Instruments with Your Students

You will improve your effective abilities as a teacher if you use an evaluative instrument with your students at the end of the course. Gaining feedback from them can help you to understand the learning styles and interests of this age level.

The evaluative instrument could be in the form of a questionnaire with ten to fifteen questions. Sample questions could be, student's favorite or least favorite project, changes they would like to see in improving the arrangement of the art room, and most importantly, the students could answer questions related to what you have taught them, so that you can evaluate how effective your teaching has been. If none of them can recall who Jackson Pollock is or none can define Abstract Expressionism, you may need to alter your lesson on this subject.

You may determine that a majority of the class disliked a project, which you could then modify or delete from your

program. It is usually obvious when students are losing interest in a project for behavioral problems, such as excessive talking or students not being on task, are evident.

Teachers need to be aware that the problem could be with the activity, and not a misbehaving classroom.

Sometimes it is not until you have used an end of the year questionnaire or open discussion that you realize students were not gaining much from particular lessons.

Your students will appreciate you using an evaluative instrument for they realize that you care about the fact that they are learning as well as enjoying their time in your class. You will find them to be extremely helpful.

Raising Student Expectation

With each new group of students you get, it is important that you begin with a discussion of what you want them to learn while they are with you. Below are a few suggestions to start out with.

- 1) Discuss rules and safety regulations of the art room.
- 2) Discuss how art is relevant to their lives and why they need to know about the arts.
- 3) Reassure them that we are here to enjoy each others creations and not to judge who is the best or the worst in the class.
- 4) Reassure them that you do not expect them to know how to draw realistically, and that realism is not the only type of art worth studying.

- 5) Discuss with them that you are here to build their confidence and knowledge of the arts. Remind them that people will respect and admire them for the knowledge they will gain.
- 6) Give continual praise and positive feedback.

Realistic Expectations

Adolescents place a high value on realistic art, as most people who are ignorant of the arts. Realistic art is art that needs no explaining. Middle school students have an interest in creating representational art based on direct observation. They seem to believe that they should be able to sit down and accurately draw a still life, and that you expect them to be able to do this. This is an unrealistic expectation they put on themselves and you need to remove it. The middle school art student will be relieved to know that you do not expect them to know how to draw and that drawing is a skill that needs years of development. Students need to be reassured that all that is required of them is that they follow directions and give their best effort, for a beautiful piece of artwork does not need to be realistic to be great.

All students should be capable of receiving an outstanding evaluation, regardless of their abilities if they are putting forth their best effort.

Building Understanding of Realism, Abstraction and Surrealism

An interest in art cannot be developed without knowledge of art. Students may be hesitant to raise their hands and comment on art for they fear their comment will be incorrect.

Building student's abilities and confidence to talk about art can be raised in a forty minute period by presenting them with three general catagories which art can fit into.

These three catagories are:

- 1) Realism
- 2) Abstraction- the subject of which are the principles and elements of art.
- 3) Surrealism- An emphasis on fantasy or art from the subconscious mind.

Show students a painting example from each of these catagories while discussing the meaning of realism, abstraction, and surrealism. When this is completed, have the students tell you which catagory each painting belongs in. It is a good idea to discuss and view a painting that is a combination of catagories so that students realize not all art fits into one catagory exclusively.

Another important point to discuss with students is that emotional reactions to art are usually universal. How a painting makes you feel: happy, sad, scared, or uneasy, is most likely making other people feel the same way.

They also need to know that we may interpret art in different ways because we come from different backgrounds. One person's idea may help you to view a piece of art in a

new way. Sharing feelings and reactions to art is an exciting experience. Once the students realize that there is no absolutely correct response to a work of art, and that ideas from everyone are important in helping us to appreciate what the work is about, they feel relieved and enjoy partaking in discussions.

Following this group discussion and lecture, students then go back to their seats and form groups of four or five where they then begin to place a group of thirty or so photos of sculptures, paintings and drawings into the three categories.

The discussions and debates that result from this exercise are wonderful. It is a marvelous way to get students interested and knowledgeable of the three general categories of realism, abstraction and surrealism, or fantasy art.

In just one forty minute period, you can raise the confidence of your student's ability to talk about art, without fearing their opinion of the art is incorrect. This encourages them to stop and discuss or contemplate art when they are confronted with it away from the classroom.

It is important to keep things simple when dealing with the middle school child, especially when it comes to exact dates. Most time references should be kept as general as possible.

An abundance of visual resources are vital to an effective art program. Art magazines are filled with

photographs of art works and can provide hundreds of visuals.

The more students view and discuss art, the more their confidence and interest in art. An art teacher has the opportunity to develop student's skills so that they may appreciate art for a lifetime.

CHAPTER IV

Summary

School is a central part of an adolescent's life in the transescent stage of their development. The reform movement underway is designed to positively influence the transitional years through teachers caring treatment of them. The recommondations are also improving the content and style of teaching to the middle level student.

Social development is threaded throughout this entire process. We are their role models. Our treatment of them will reflect how they treat others.

At no other grade level is values clarification as important as during the transitional stage of adolescent development.

Teaching the transescent to be a social being may be as important as the content you teach. Middle school teacher sshould be teaching students acceptable social behaviors through the teaching of their subject. Students of this age need to be reminded of why certain behaviors are not acceptable because of the consequence the behavior may have on others.

Teaching transescents can be a wonderful experience. Students of this age still look up to their teachers and have an interest in them as people. They possess an eagerness to learn and explore.

The transescent adolescent is struggling to find himself through the physical, emotional and cognitive changes that are occurring. They are grateful to find a caring teacher who is knowledgeable and sensitive to the changes and feelings taking place in their lives.

It is my hope that this handbook has increased your knowledge of the middle school student to the point of influencing your approach to teaching and relating to them on a personal level.

An important phrase to remember is, "kids don't learn from teachers they don't like." Student's will generally not like a teacher who is not caring and understanding. The middle level requires enthusiastic teachers, who can provide a positive, caring , learning environment for adolescents who are making decisions that can affect them for a lifetime. Art provides them with an appropriate mode of learning that builds their self-esteem.

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