TEACHING STRATEGIES

Cultivating an Environment for Art Instruction

The teacher's role is to provide an environment in which rich art experiences can happen and to guide and challenge all children in their art making. Accordingly, strategies and expectations must be appropriate to the individual situation. Art by its very nature, is one subject in which the individuality of each child can be accommodated. When children express themselves verbally, visually, dramatically, or musically, we should expect diversity in the content and sophistication of the expression. Diversity must be fostered.

Openness, flexibility, appreciation, encouragement, and acceptance are conducive to self-expression. At the same time, an organized physical environment, a set classroom routine, and clear behavioural expectations provide children with a sense of security.

An organized physical environment provides at least two other benefits. First, the children can easily take and return materials themselves, and therefore learn to take on some of the responsibility for the care of art materials. Second, confusion is avoided.

Directions should be clear and simple. If they are misunderstood, they can be repeated or demonstrated as required.

Expectations should be adjusted to the individual child. If a task is too difficult for a child, the time may be extended or the task reduced. If the task is too simple, the child should be challenged with ideas, materials, and processes.

Child art is not the same as adult art. Adult forms of expression should not be expected from children.

Topics for art making should be explored using as many approaches as possible. Other modes of expression such as music, drama, dance, film, literature, and poetry, can be used to do this. If children use a multisensory approach to explore themselves and their environment, the children will most certainly discover aspects that may have been overlooked.

Children should have the option of using a variety of media. Children will prefer certain materials and processes more than others. They should be permitted to use those with which they feel comfortable and are sure to obtain some measure of success. However, it is also important to encourage them to experiment with and learn about the potential of new materials as well.

The atmosphere in any art class should be encouraging and supportive; children should never feel uncomfortable about expressing their feelings and ideas.
presented, the following guidelines will provide a framework within which teachers can develop instructional sequences in art.

Primary and elementary children are curious about their world. Through exploration and experience with play, people, and their environment they attempt to make sense of it. They must refine and continue this process in school. This necessitates their becoming actively involved through many experiences with real materials and events. They need to observe, touch, manipulate and describe before working with representations in art making. Children should also be encouraged to question issues and suggest solutions. How well a child does this depends on the richness and significance of the topic, the direction by teacher’s questioning, and the opportunities given for predicting, comparing, contrasting, summarizing, and evaluating. Every lesson should be organized to encourage children’s active participation and allow them opportunities to discover concepts through guided observation and the manipulation of materials. Within this general inquiry approach the teacher should also ensure that art learning experiences

* are part of a long-term plan
* have specific purposes
* provide for continuity of learning
* encourage children to work at their rate of development
* provide time for shared learning
* provide immediate, positive reinforcement of the learning that has taken place.

**Instructional Approaches**

The instructional approaches used to teach art concepts and skills are very similar in methodology and organization to the approaches used in other subjects. It is not possible to prescribe in detail how every lesson should be taught because teacher interest, teacher training, class size, available resources, and individual needs vary from situation to situation. Flexibility is important. The “teachable moment” should never be missed. Teachers may have to switch plans in midstream because a certain suggestion or situation arises in class. Careful observation often indicates the direction the lesson should take and what an appropriate follow-up would include. Teachers should always change or adapt plans to fit their own situation. Knowledge of the students, the materials available in the school, and personal experiences should be a guiding force in lesson planning. Taking into consideration the variables previously
Format

There is no single way to go about teaching art. It is possible, however, to include the points above by using a lesson format that has the following components:

- Introduction/Motivation (10-20% of teaching time)
- Activity Period (60-80% of teaching time)
- Culmination/Summary (10-20% of teaching time)

Introduction/Motivation

The function of the introduction to the art lesson is to focus the children's attention. There are many ways to do this:

- Pose a question about an event, activity, or object (e.g., recent visit by a clown).
- Have students recall content or concepts from a previous lesson (e.g., can anyone remember what we did to make our dinosaurs textured in our last lesson?).
- Pose a problem (e.g., how can we use these oil pastels to make the fur on our cats look soft?).
- Present a technique (e.g., today we are going to try painting the background of our pictures first).

Sometimes the introduction to a lesson will motivate pupils sufficiently so that they will need little further stimulation, but usually they will need to be motivated to elaborate on a theme or topic.

Motivation can take many forms, but without a doubt the most vital and successful art projects are usually the result of vivid and meaningful personal experiences. Nothing replaces direct contact or immediate observation for eliciting a richly expressive response. The role of discussion in motivation cannot be overemphasized.

Comparisons of visual aspects of an object, such as shape, texture, colour, size, direction, promotes keen observation. Rich verbal description fosters heightened visual awareness. Sharing observations, remembrances, and ideas may trigger more thoughts in other class members. Further, students must be encouraged to talk about their own work, the work of other students and artists. Looking and discussing slows everybody down so that the looking is prolonged and more insightful. Students will also come to realize, appreciate, and respect the variety among images, among the people who create them and our responses to them.

If the class plans to paint pictures of pets, the best thing to do is look at some pets and discuss them: the shape of the body and the head; the location, shape, and size of the ears and their relation to the size of the head; the texture of the coat; the colour of the animal; and so on. Although some of the children may have a well-developed mental image of the animal, many of the children have now been given the opportunity to enrich their visual concept of the animal. The same holds true whatever the object being depicted. If the class has an opportunity to go on a field trip to look at objects in their own environment so much the better.

Often, it is not possible to observe
an object firsthand. Then the teacher may employ alternatives such as looking at pictures of the objects, participating in related events, or dramatization. For example, in addition to describing the animal and its actions, the children can act out these things. The children and teacher should at the same time engage in discussion that will enrich the child’s visual image of that object or event.

Sometimes the observation, description, and discussion may be centred on art works themselves. These may be student works or the works of professional artists. In either case, they may be discussed in terms of their subject matter just as objects and events can be discussed. Art works have the added benefit of incorporating design concepts and art processes for discussion as well. This is addressed in another part of this guide.

Description and discussion enhance the visual imagery of children of all ages. As the child grows older, observation becomes more complex; there is so much more detail to apprehend. Discussion therefore becomes more sophisticated. If depicting an orchestral performance, for example, the following may be a starting point for observation and description:

- the variety of shapes and sizes of instruments
- the arrangement of the musicians on stage
- the way musicians hold their instruments
- the way they move
- the seating arrangement of the audience
- the lighting
- the sounds
- the mood

Description and discussion cultivate rich observation and visual analysis. This activity ensures that all students get a good grounding before they even attempt to make a visual image. It is a good beginning to art making.

Timing is very important in successful motivation. The teacher can usually sense when children have reached a fatigue point. Time allocated to the motivational session should not infringe on the student’s activity time. Sometimes, however, the students may become so involved in the motivation session that the activity session may need to be carried over to another period.

The following are some motivational materials and resources:

- original art works
- reproductions of paintings, sculpture, prints, and crafts
- photographs (colour, black and white)
- colour slides of art works and of the environment
- books (poetry, picture books, art books)
- recordings of music
- guest (clown, dancer, musician, scuba diver, etc.)
be done by the children under the teacher’s direction. Many classrooms have designated helpers assigned either on a daily or weekly basis who can also be used during art activities. Efficient classroom management can do much to reduce the physical and emotional drain of teaching and can free time for more genuine educational activity.

During the activity period, the teacher’s role is to help children say what they want to say in their own way. The child must remain in control of the ideas being expressed. In order for this to occur, the teacher has to assume the role of facilitator. The teacher, in the selection of objectives and motivational activity has initially assisted the child by selecting a framework within which to explore. Some children are capable of working within these parameters without any further assistance. There are other children who, for various reasons, cannot always be expected to solve problems and reach goals without help. When children have reached the end of their resources, they should receive assistance from the teacher before becoming frustrated. The teacher’s assistance should be just enough to help the child overcome the immediate difficulty. Asking questions or demonstrating without imposing your own ideas is the best approach.

As teachers we must be supportive and encouraging throughout the activity period. We want to provide positive art experiences - one that will generate interest and encourage further development. It is often difficult to know what to say in this situation. Over the years we have probably heard or used a variety of responses: “Oh, how lovely”, “That’s great work”, “I just love it”. Such comments do nothing to
encourage dialogue with the child nor do they support the child’s artistic development.

"Lovely" and "good" are often overworked. Such comments also place undue emphasis on the product and give little attention to the process which is often much more important to the child.

A common approach is to ask the child "What is it?" When a young child is questioned in this way, you may not get an answer because what s/he has created is very personal. At such times, you may find a child searching for an answer because s/he feels there must be one if you have asked.

We are often tempted to make a positive comment and follow it with a well-intentioned recommendation or correction. Children’s art, however, is not intended to be a carbon copy of reality. The child includes or omits details depending on personal interpretation or stage of artistic development. Corrections or criticism may discourage children.

How then can we best encourage children during the activity period and at the same time provide opportunities for dialogue and learning? The following paragraphs offer a number of suggestions.

Allow the students time to consider and respond. The next time a student shows a work you smile, pause, and say nothing. This will give you an opportunity to reflect on what you might want to say and it will also give students an opportunity to talk first if s/he chooses.

Alternatively, the teacher can describe the image. Talk about the elements of design evident in the child’s art. Comments can focus on content, concepts, and feelings. Children need to hear art vocabulary. They need to realize that we are aware of the work they have done. This helps to develop their observational skills.

Comments or descriptions should include reference to

- The elements the child has used.
  "You have used dark colours in your picture."
  "I like the way the red contrasts with the blue."

- The art principles the child has used (e.g., rhythm, balance, composition)
  "You did a good job of repeating that circular shape. It gives your picture a sense of rhythm."
  "These two dark red horses really balance that large blue one on the other side."

- The expressive quality of the child’s work.
  "The yellows in your picture make me feel warm and happy."
  "Those jagged lines make me think about angry feelings."

- The inventiveness, ingenuity, and imagination in the child’s work.
  "Sara made her sun look different by using a number of warm colours."
  "Bob’s drawing shows us a different way to think about horses."
• Some desired behaviour in the child’s efforts.

"Joey has spent a long time working on his picture. He wants us to know a lot about his new fort."

• Evidence of improved skill and control of medium.

"Laura is doing an excellent job showing texture with her pastels. See how she has used short smooth lines."

When we take this positive, objective approach, we lend support to the child’s affective and artistic development. One, children know that you are looking carefully at their art and that you are interested in it. Two, you are either giving children new art vocabulary or reinforcing vocabulary that has been used previously. Three, you are helping children to look closely at their own work. Four, you are helping children realize what skills they possess.

Remember that describing what you see does not mean saying what you think. Comments must be non-judgemental.

"You used a lot of blue and black."
"You’ve filled up most of the paper."
"You’ve made many curved lines. "How did you move your hand to get these circles?" "How did you hold your crayon to get such dark lines?"

At times, teachers may hold up a student’s work for the class to see. When this is done it is important to give specific reasons. For example, "This picture takes up the whole page used. See how the sky comes down to the hills and there are trees in the background." Such encouraging remarks can keep children on target. It should be possible to find something commendable in every child’s picture.

Summary

After the art making phase, the students’ work should be displayed so that everyone can see it. Both the work and the process can then be discussed by the teacher and the students. This discussion should take place within the lesson, but if that is not possible, it can take place at the earliest opportunity or in the next lesson.

Discussion after the process is invaluable. It provides an opportunity to review the objectives of the lesson and focus on student achievement. It helps children consolidate concepts, review techniques, and identify alternatives, and it gives children the opportunity to see and appreciate a variety of approaches to art making. Discussion will even give some direction to future art endeavours.

The discussion must always be constructive, emphasizing achievement. Through questioning, the teacher can direct students to describe specific features and qualities of the art works.

The following excerpt gives more detailed information on leading this summary discussion (or as it is referred to in the excerpt - the critique).

The Process of Critiquing*

To critique does not mean to criticize. Through critiquing one is helping children to talk about their own work and progress. Even though the children may be too young to comprehend some of the qualities and concepts mentioned below, it is important
for the teacher to have a grasp of them, and to use them as a frame of reference in talking about the work or getting the children involved. The children may be too young to understand the concept and terms, but they are intuitive designers and these qualities may appear in their work.

*How You Might Go About Leading a Critique*

(A positive conversation about the children's work or artist's work.)

- Look at the work ahead of time to see what there is and what it is like.
- Ask yourself questions such as: "How have the children dealt with the objectives of the activity, the challenge?" Describe some of the pieces to yourself (as if you were describing them to someone on the phone).
- Look at the colours, lines, shapes, size, how placed, spaces, textures, pattern, tonal qualities, contrast, variety, repetition, movement, centre of interest. Look for different styles and moods.
- Look for positive qualities or teaching points that could be brought out.
- Be positive and appreciative.
- Be neutral.
- Choose several examples to make a point.
- Accept more than one response to each question.
- Ask question that do not have an absolute right/wrong answer.
- Ask questions that bring out contrasting ways of working, but do not make value comparisons.
- Talk about the work rather than who did it. Be objective (e.g., "which painting" rather than "whose painting").
- Give children an opportunity to ask questions or make a point (positive or neutral). Give children an opportunity to talk about their own work.

*Types of Questions*

- What colour seems brightest in the painting?
- Which paintings have a great variety of colours?
- Which paintings have only a few colours? Can you describe the difference in effect?
- Which painting would you describe as bright? As dull?
- What feelings does the colour give?

Levels of Questions

Knowledge, comprehension
(e.g.) Which words come immediately to mind? (It could be a spontaneous exercise in which you list words). What do you see in the painting?

Analysis (taking apart)
How did the artist create this feeling?
(list words to do with feelings.)

Synthesis (putting together in a new way)
(e.g.) Image ... Project ... What if ...?

Evaluation (significance, appreciation)
(e.g.) What was communicated? What was the artist trying to say or get across.

• Which prints have more empty space than printed surface? What is the effect?

• Which pattern is bold? Which pattern is soft and subtle?

• Where would you like to see these patterns used?

• Which designs have a strong focal point? What makes your attention focus there? Why do you look there first?

• Which pictures feel calm? Why?

• Is there one picture you would like to talk about? What do you find interesting?

• Would anyone like to talk about their own work?
INTEGRATION

Art has a long history of integration. Like language, art has the facility to cross all subject barriers and permeate all aspects of the child's life. The skills learned in art can be used to enhance work in any subject. Art education encourages divergent and creative thinking, heightens student awareness of the environment, and develops special knowledge and concepts. Art activities are motivational; they are used for creating interest in many subjects. The ease with which art is integrated sometimes causes problems. Very often, the objectives of the art program are overlooked or, at best, touched on briefly. For example, children may illustrate a language arts story without ever being taught art concepts or skills. Such an approach gives art less than its due. Art objectives should be included in any lesson that involves art making. If children are illustrating a story, a short lesson or an art concept (e.g., foreground, background) can be taught before they begin.

Another way to integrate art is to use the subject matter from other curriculum areas as motivation for visual expression. For example, an open-ended theme from the language arts program such as dragons or dinosaurs, can provide content for many meaningful visual experiences in sculpture, drawing, painting, or printmaking. To be truly integrated, art concepts and skills must be addressed in the lesson. Some aspect of texture, colour, shape, line, or scale may be addressed. This could be as simple as making a short reference to the concept, looking at a visual image illustrating the concept, or referring to a previous art lesson the concept.

Integration means more than combining content or skills from various areas. As Lowenfeld wrote, the parts that are integrated must add up to something new for the child. It is when children have a view of the whole that true integration has taken place.

Gregory Watkins, Sumnerford Integrated Elementary, Grade 1
"Salmon"
Michelle Kenny, St. Francis of Assisi School, Outer Cove. Grade 6
"What I Would Like To Have In My Back Yard"