

Up Against It: Why do we still face the same advocacy challenges?

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Advocating for the arts is a vital and continuous task. As art educators we understand and value the importance of art education. We can easily voice numerous benefits. However, we often feel constantly up against the wall, once again advocating for the importance of the very classes we were hired to teach. The obstacles feel numerous. Is there a way to decrease the need to advocate and to increase the acceptance and value of the arts? One conundrum that we find ourselves reflecting upon is the way in which our continued advocacy tasks seem never-ending and cyclical. What are we not doing in our classrooms that results in our students becoming parents who don't support the arts? One solution is to carefully consider the messages we convey to our students in the classroom. Do the students leaving our classes understand the role of the arts? Are they instilled with lifelong artistic habits, and have they been taught the importance of the arts? They may implicitly sense the value – that's why they come to class – but do they explicitly understand? Can they articulate the intrinsic value of the arts?

5 Ways to Explicitly Teach that the Arts Are Important:

Personal Story/History/Identity (Material Culture)

Quote: "The significance of these objects [human made objects including visual art] resides not in their monetary worth but in the personal value that these articles hold for their possessor. Many of us decide to retain certain things in our lives because of the importance we believe these items have for us individually. We choose to hold on to particular things because of what these items meant to us; however, the worth of these objects for others is often not readily apparent, and it may even be difficult for them to discern or to acknowledge that these objects hold any value at all." (Blandy and Bolin, 2018, p. 11)

Explanation: "Material culture" is the term used to enfold and acknowledge all objects made by humans: art, visual culture, furniture, fashion, etc. These objects are designed, made, sold, chosen, kept or discarded based upon the stories they help us tell, our identities, or our desire to express/change our identities. Understanding why we keep or discard things, and how things help us make meaning bring levity to self reflection.

Fundamental Expression/Communication/Delight/Mindfulness

Quote: "Unlike the distractions of Netflix or a crossword, Drawing helps us, not to escape but instead engage deeply with the present moment. Drawing provides a protected, sheltered place to reflect on our experiences, ideas, and observations. As we draw, we enter the virtual world we have created. We record what we see, or maybe images and stories that emerge from our minds from the process." (Kantrowitz, 2022)

Possible Artist(s) to feature:

- Mark Dion
- Rebecca Scott, *Perfect Life*
- Mat Collishaw, *Last Meal on Death Row*

Standard Connection:

Anchor Standard 4: Analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.
Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
Anchor Standard 8: Interpret meaning in artistic work.
Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
Anchor Standard 10: Relate and synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to inspire and inform artistic work.
Anchor Standard 11: Investigate ways that artistic work is influenced by societal, cultural, and historical context and, in turn, how artistic ideas shape cultures past, present, and future.

Explanation: Making marks, making art can fuel personal expression, self-care, mental health, personal fulfillment, delight and play.

Artist(s) to feature:

- Sam Boughton
- Amy Maricle
- Laura Horn

Standard Connection:

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas

and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and Develop Artistic Ideas and Work.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Social Justice

Quote: "It may be the recovery of imagination that lessens the social paralysis we see around us and restores the sense that something can be done in the name of what is decent and humane." (Maxine Greene, 1995, p. 35)

Explanation: Visual art, like all of the arts, builds empathy and perspective-taking; the foundational bastion of building a community of people willing to help others and make change in the world. When their pain and experiences can be known and understood, then it becomes less tolerable.

Possible Artist(s) to feature:

- Tom Kiefer, Knolling Photography
- Stephen Carpenter, Water Project
- Underwater Museum, Coral Reef Rejuvenation

Work/Livelihood/Career

Quote: "Arts education aids students in skills needed in the workplace: flexibility, the ability to solve problems and communicate, the ability to learn new skills, to be creative and innovative, and to strive for excellence." (Calahan, J. M., Director of Corporate Communications, Xerox Corporation)

Explanation: Long-term industry projections by New York State's Department of Labor for jobs in Arts and Entertainment between 2022-2023 predicts an increase of 25%, roughly 2% per year topped only by Hotel Services, Hospitals, Ambulatory Healthcare, and Social Assistance. In addition, creativity (Studio Habit: Envision, Stretch & Explore), communication (Studio Habit: Express), and flexibility (Studio Habit: Stretch & Explore, Engage & Persist) remain on the list of 21st Century Skills sought in workplaces.

Community and Interconnection

Quote: "The arts are not a frill. ...What is there that can transcend deep differences and stubborn divisions? The arts. They have a wonderful universality. Art has the potential to unify. It can speak in many languages without a translator. The arts do not discriminate. The arts can lift us up." – Former Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan

Explanation: We create our culture even as it creates us. When we understand the role the arts play in bringing us together – or a story, for a movie, for a play, for a gallery exhibition – we find the commonality of our experiences. We find that we are not as alone as we sometimes feel.

Anchor Standard 10: Relate and synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to inspire and inform artistic work.
Anchor Standard 11: Investigate ways that artistic work is influenced by societal, cultural, and historical context and, in turn, how artistic ideas shape cultures past, present, and future.

Standard Connection:

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and Develop Artistic Ideas and Work

Anchor Standard 4: Analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard 10: Relate and synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to inspire and inform artistic work

Anchor Standard 11: Investigate ways that artistic work is influenced by societal, cultural, and historical context and, in turn, how artistic ideas shape cultures past, present, and future.

Possible Artist(s) to feature:

- Simone Giertz
- Ronald Rael and Virginia San Fratello
- Polina Oshu

Standard Connection:

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Possible Artist(s) to feature:

- Gee Bend Quilters Collective
- Kelsey Montague
- Lexi Ho-Tai

Standard Connection:

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 10: Relate and synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to inspire and inform artistic work.

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influenced by societal, cultural, and historical context and, in turn, how artistic ideas shape cultures past, present, and future.

arts educators should strive to make purposeful instructional decisions with the goal of preparing students to become advocates of the arts as adults.

Artists/educators who are tired of facing the same advocacy challenges as those who came before them can reduce challenges by explicitly teaching that the arts are important. The "5 Ways" listed above provide opportunities to teach the importance of art and the roles art plays in our lives. The quotes and artists for each topic can be used as starting points and changed when needed to take into consideration student developmental levels and individual school communities. If true change is to be seen, instruction should begin early and continue through all levels of education. All

References

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Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. Jossey-Bass.

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