

Boost Creativity and Innovation

by Nan E. Hathaway

Creativity, innovation, differentiation ... words so frequently heard in professional development meetings, district pep talks and school improvement plans, characterize *next practice*—teaching that pushes beyond research-proven best practice toward new, unprecedented horizons for excellence and innovation.

Increasingly, we are asked to also consider next practice and 21st-century learning skills when designing art experiences and developing curricula—skills that focus on innovation, creativity, flexibility and collaboration, among others (see complete list by visiting: www.p21.org/documents/P21_arts_map_final.pdf).

Practical avenues for delivering next practice and 21st-century skills can be elusive for teachers already burdened with budget constraints and increasing class size. It can be challenging to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to implement curriculum that addresses innovation and creativity, district directives and school-wide learning initiatives.

Educators may instead revert to outdated methods in an effort to “cover” material quickly and abandon pie-in-the-sky dreams of fostering initiative and self-direction: there just isn’t time.

To meet contemporary learning goals for next practice, however, teachers need to shift responsibility to students who, in turn, need to assume more control of their own learning. The goal, after all, is to produce life-long learners, not life-long pupils. To accomplish this, students need experience becoming problem finders, not just problem solvers.

Art teachers who seek to develop “next practice” and promote creativity, innovation and intrinsic motivation for

21st-century learners might consider the following:

- If the teacher chooses the medium, the student chooses the subject or vice versa.
- Facilitate genuinely open-ended projects; those for which the outcome cannot be predicted.
- Embrace opportunities for students to learn from mistakes: Don’t work out the problems ahead of time for them in an attempt to produce “no fail” projects.

• Devise ways students can revisit materials, methods and ideas to gain mastery.

• Withhold “exemplars,” which can encourage imitation and hinder the development of original ideas and approaches. Save these to make connections with artists and art history after students engage in art making.

• Permit self-initiated exploration.

• Allow students the option of working alone or with a peer(s) of their choice. Authentic collaborative work can be uniquely motivating and rich in interdisciplinary learning.

• Offer flexible deadlines.

• Provide students an opportunity for “incubation” by alerting them at least one class ahead about what the next project will entail. This gives them an opportunity for creative preparation not possible when asked to begin a project immediately after it is assigned. With time to consider possibilities, they are

better able to create more personal, meaningful art work.

- Model artistic behavior: find time, in and outside the classroom, to make art of your own.

In an era of escalating standardization, it is more important than ever for art educators to provide meaningful counter-balance and champion creative possibility. ■



“True Expression” Griffin Cunningham, grade 7: *When you lock your personality inside for a long time, it gets restless. When you finally let it out, it is able to be its true form and flies! Freed, it is full of joy and can be spread everywhere, making others happy and maybe have their true personality come out also.*

Nan E. Hathaway is a middle-school art teacher in Vermont. She is a member of Teaching for Artistic Behavior, Inc. (TAB) and authors studio-learning.blogspot.com.



Go to artsandactivities.com and click on this button for links to the resource mentioned in this article.