



Breaking the Surface: Deepening Art Education through History & Theory

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Abstract

Arts integration has been supported as an attempt to preserve what little art is left in school curriculum. Mostly, though, this involves adding creative projects in conjunction with a lesson. My work in art education involves bringing artwork into the classroom as a source for teaching. History and sociology are prime areas: Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People on the Barricades* in a lesson about the French Revolution; Pop Art in an economics lesson.

Art is one of the greatest products of its time and place and chronicles history and its people better than any other source. Art history is human history and is a visual primary source of its time and people.

Teaching art history and theory as early as preschool and elementary school is also a huge asset to developing visual language skills-especially at an age where reading and writing have not been mastered yet. Discussing artworks gives children a chance to observe and analyze-understanding how colors, lines, brush strokes can imply feelings and ideas. They learn the infinite number of ways people can express themselves. They see the way ideas and styles are built upon the past. They can begin to understand why we create the way we do. It provides an invaluable opportunity to practice self-critique and evaluating others. They learn to back up their opinions with reasoning and evidence.

Even at a young age, children can learn to be discerning and expressive far beyond standard arts and crafts. The lack of art history curriculum has contributed to a current group of adults who are turned off by art because of its foreignness. Providing a solid history and theory-based art education enhances students' understanding of other subjects, reinforces visual language skills and prepares them with valuable skills and a broader knowledge-base for the rest of their lives.