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A Balanced Comprehensive Art Curriculum Makes Sense

In Ohio, they call it BCAC, and, despite some implementation obstacles, teachers report moderate success in translating theory into practice in K-12 classrooms.

Photographs courtesy of State Art Education Consultant, Columbus, Ohio

Examining each other's self-portraits, seventh-graders practice the tasks of art critics within the familiar context of their classrooms.

A new wind is blowing in art education today, all across the country. It's a gentle breeze now, but soon it could become a hurricane. The wind I'm talking about is a new approach to teaching art in elementary and secondary schools. Frankly, it is controversial for a number of theoretical and practical reasons.

This new approach goes by different names in different places. In Ohio, we call it BCAC, meaning Balanced Comprehensive Art Curriculum. BCAC is comprehensive because it includes art criticism, art history, and art in society, as well as traditional art production. And BCAC is balanced because students in kindergarten through twelfth grade receive equitable instructional time, staff, and resources in all four curriculum areas.

"Self-Portraits"

The BCAC approach makes sense as an art curriculum for all schools in the country. To illustrate why, I'll describe how it works in "Self-Portraits,"[1] a seventh-grade unit that teachers in Ohio have written and taught to their students. Notice how the unit extends the usual art production activity and ties together activities in all four curriculum areas of the BCAC model.

Art production. The traditional studio activity involves making self-portraits, which can be tempera paintings, collages, clay sculptures, or papier-mâché masks. The medium is not of central concern in this unit; the main purpose is for students to get in touch with their own personalities as sources for ideas in art and to transform these ideas into self-portraits, paying particular attention to color, shape, and texture.

So far this sounds like a fairly typical art activity: making art. Adding three other types of activities—art history, art criticism, and art in society—makes it a BCAC unit.

Art history. In the historical activity, which can come before or after the activity in which students make their own portraits, students examine artists' self-portraits in order to see connections between their own work and that of the artists. Through careful observation of artists' self-portraits and through readings in art history, students learn to speculate on the different sources from which artists obtain their ideas for their work. For example, some artists, like Albrecht Dürer, get their ideas for portraits of themselves by looking at their reflections in a mirror. Other artists, like Vincent van Gogh, look at their inner feelings, moods, and personality traits for ideas. And still other artists recall earlier events in their lives, as Chagall did for his portrait, *I and the Village*. In selecting artists' self-portraits for students to study, the teacher has all of art history to choose from—up to as recent as five minutes ago.

In their study of the history of self-portraits, seventh-graders could also examine the different ways artists transform their ideas into works of art by means of color, shape, and texture. The emphasis in this activity is on the *artists' expression*.

Art criticism. The emphasis in teaching art criticism is on *responding* to art, on deriving meaning from works of art. In this unit on self-portraits, a teacher could have students respond critically to their own completed self-portraits or to artists' self-portraits. By "critically," I don't mean that students should verbally "tear down" other students' and artists' work. Instead, students learn to do three things that are part of the critical process—to *describe* the aesthetic qualities in works of art, to *interpret* their meanings, and to *judge* them. These are the three components of art criticism, also the tasks of professional art critics. Thus, another activity might consist of helping students understand the ways art critics describe, interpret, and judge self-portraits.

Art in society. In addition to the personal ideas of artists, self-portraits can be seen as expressions of the societies in which they have been made. Thus, art-in-society activities become opportunities for students to study the values and beliefs of social groups that are embodied in works of art. In this unit, activities would help students discover the social messages from the social environment hidden in

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Resources

Books

Brandwein, Paul. *Self Expression and Conduct, The Humanities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974.

Bonner, Gerald F., and George F. Horn. *Art in Your World*. Worcester: Davis Publishing Co. Inc., 1977.

Bonner, Gerald F., and George F. Horn. *Art: Your Visual Environment*. Worcester: Davis Publishing Co. Inc., 1977.

Chapman, Laura. *Discover Art*. Worcester: Davis Publications, Inc., 1985. An excellent textbook series for grades 1–6.

Clark, Gilbert, and Enid Zimmerman. *Art Design: Communicating Visually*. Blauvelt, N.Y.: Art Education, Inc., 1913.

Glubok, Shirley. She is the author of numerous titles on art and culture for young readers.

Goldstein, Ernest. *Creating and Understanding Art*, Book I and II. Champaign: Garrard Publishing Co., 1986.

Goldstein, Ernest. *Let's Get Lost in a Painting*. Champaign: Garrard Publishing Co., 1984. A series of four books.

Heyne, Carl J., et al. *Art for Young America*. 8th ed. Peoria: Charles A. Bennett, 1979.

Hubbard, Guy. *Art: Meaning, Method, and Media*. San Diego: Benefic Press, 1982.

Janson, H. W. *History of Art for Young People*. New York: American Book Co., 1971.

Janson, H. W., and Dora Janson. *The Story of Painting for Young People from Cave Painting to Modern Times*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1962.

Lerner Publishing Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota) has published a number of titles (. . . *in Art*) by different authors for young readers.

Morman, Jean M. *Art of a Wonder and a World*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

Morman, Jean M. *Wonder Under Your Feet: Making the World of Art Your Own*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Ruskin, Ariane. *Story of Art for Young People*. New York: Pantheon, 1964.

Filmstrips, Slides, and Reproductions

Alva Museum Replicas, 30–30 North Blvd., Long Island City, NY 11101.

Art Education, Inc., Blauvelt, NY 10913.

Art Text Prints, Inc., Westport, CT 06880.

Center for Humanities, Inc., 2 Holland Ave., White Plains, NY 10603.

National Gallery of Art, Extension Service, Constitution Ave. and Sixth St., N.W, Washington, DC 20566. They have numerous art history filmstrips. This is a free service.

Reinhold Publishing Co., 600 Summer, Stamford, CT 06901.

Sandak, Inc., 180 Harvard Ave., Stamford, CT 06902. They have many art history slides services. The best for young people is "Visual Sources for Learning (VSL)."

Shorewood Reproductions, Inc., 475 Tenth Ave., New York, NY 10018.

University Prints, 15 Brattle St., Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Van Nostrand Reinhold, 450 W. 33rd St., New York, NY 10001.

Kits

Artist Jr. Fine Arts Publishing Co., 1346 Chapel St., New Haven, CT 06511. They have book boxes on many art history themes for junior high students. The boxes include reading, reproductions, and filmstrips.

CEMREL, Aesthetic Education Kits, available from Viking Press, 625 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022.

National Instructional Television, *Images and Things*, "Learning Resources," Box A, Bloomington, IN 47401.

Scholastic Magazine, Inc., *Art and Man*, 50 W. 44th St., New York, NY 10036. This is a bimonthly magazine on art that is accompanied by a filmstrip tape series on art historical themes.

Wilton Art Appreciation Programs, P.0. Box 302, Wilton, CT 06897. They have a number of filmstrip tape series on art historical themes.

Television

Images and Things, National Instructional Television, Box A, Bloomington, IN 47401, 1984. An excellent 30-program series on art for elementary school students. Tapes are available.

Arts Alive. National Instructional Television, Box A, Bloomington, IN 47401, 1984. An excellent 13-program series on art, music, dance, and drama for 8- to 14-year-old students. The series is being broadcast over educational television stations in many states.

Curriculum Guidelines

Planning Art Education in the Middle/Secondary Schools of Ohio. Columbus: Ohio Department of Education, 1977.

"What's an Art Curriculum for, Anyway?" (television program). Columbus: Ohio Department of Education, 1980. Available from Ohio ETV stations.

Fine Arts and Physical Education. Columbus: Ohio Department of Education, 1983.

self-portraits. What could these be? To me, logos are the self-portraits of businesses and corporations. Teachers ask students to assemble a variety of logos found in newspapers, magazines, and phone books. Then students try to decipher the social values and beliefs expressed by the logos. For example, what social values and beliefs are expressed by McDonald's golden arches? Social critics have suggested that the logo's visual characteristics express motherhood, sex, and power. Is it possible that, in addition to juicy hamburgers and crisp french fries, these messages are what attract customers to McDonald's?

Learning to read their visual environment in this way is essential for elementary and secondary school students. Without being able to read their visual environment, students will be insensitive to the ways they are affected by visual forms and images around them in advertising, architecture, and environmental sculpture, and therefore vulnerable to control by forces they cannot understand or change.

A Balanced Comprehensive Art Curriculum

Table 1 lists six major goals that constitute a balanced comprehensive art curriculum.[2] In the BCAC model, art production, the traditional studio approach, is the core. The main activity is making art, but the meanings their own work has for students expand considerably as they learn to talk about art, find out about artists and their work, study the work of art critics and art historians, and observe art in society. Learnings in one curriculum area build on and reinforce learnings in the others.

While some units could address all six goals, not all units need to do so. At least three goals of the teachers' choosing would be enough to constitute a BCAC unit. Imagine what a teacher might do with other traditional studio exercises by adding activities in art criticism, art history, and art in society. Visualize what expanded units would look like in figure drawing, animal sculpture, Halloween masks, landscape painting, lettering, Impressionism, printmaking, and design.

It's more than fun; it's a study of the influence of primitive cultures on the development of cubism in sculpture.

Teachers usually begin with activities they are familiar with, probably art production; they could begin by studying an artist's work. About the work, teachers could ask, "What is the essence of the work? What questions is the artist asking about art and life? Could my students find their own answers to these questions through creating their own artwork?"

In essence, designing a BCAC unit is a matter of finding relationships among students, art professionals, and society. Manuel Barkan said it very well:

> The professional scholars in art—the artists, the critics, the historians—would be the models for inquiry, because the kind of human meaning questions they ask about art and life, and their particular ways of conceiving and acting on these questions are the kinds of questions and ways of acting that art instruction would be seeking to teach students to ask and act upon. The

Table 1
Major Goals of a Balanced Comprehensive Art Curriculum

Art is for People:

Art is Experienced as	Students	Professionals	Social Groups
EXPRESSION and **RESPONSE**	**PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**	**ARTISTIC HERITAGE**	**ART IN SOCIETY**
	To provide individuals with opportunities to acquire and develop their powers of expression by visual means	To provide individuals with opportunities to become aware of the achievements of artists in the past and present, including the particular ways they engage in artistic expression	To provide individuals with opportunities to study the ways visual imagery is used to express, shape, and reflect the values, beliefs, and conflicts of society
	To provide individuals with opportunities to perceive and respond to visual qualities in works of art and in the environment	To provide individuals with opportunities to study the critical and historical responses of scholars in the field of art, including the particular ways they pursue their studies	To provide individuals with opportunities to study ways society responds to visual imagery

artist and critic would serve as models for questions that could be asked about contemporary life. The historian would serve as model for questions that might be asked about art and life in other times, other societies, and other cultures in order to illuminate the meaning of the past for better understanding of current pressing problems.[3]

Barkan is credited with beginning BCAC 20 years ago, althought it wasn't called BCAC then. Subsequently, others have elaborated on Barkan's germ of an idea. The most well-known name is DBAE, Discipline-Based Art Education, and the Getty Center for Education in the Arts has been its most vocal and influential advocate.

BCAC and DBAE are similar winds blowing in the same direction. For over 16 years I have been promoting this approach; but changes in schools come very, very slowly. Apparently this slow pace is the same throughout the country. Three years ago, when the Rand Corporation surveyed the country to identify school districts in which discipline-based art education programs were in regular operation, only seven were found.

Art teachers tell me there are five obstacles to introducing BCAC in their schools.[4] First, few teachers have learned to design BCAC units in their undergraduate and graduate courses. Second, without having had a chance in college to plan units, teachers do not have the time to plan and research such extensive content. Third, teachers are reluctant to take time away from teaching studio activities in order to teach art history and art criticism. Fourth, to teach these new disciplines, they need additional visual resources, such as art reproductions, students' study prints, slides, filmstrips, television tapes, films, books, magazines, even textbooks. Fifth, without administrative support, this new approach and the wherewithal to implement it will go nowhere.

Overcoming the Obstacles

Although these obstacles are real, there are ways to overcome them. First, teachers must realize that a BCAC approach makes sense. Then, if they decide to go in this direction, teachers should know that they are going with a winner. The Ohio art curriculum guide, *Planning Art Education in the Middle/Secondary Schools of Ohio*, received the National Art Education Association (NAEA) award for the best state art curriculum guide in the nation in 1983.

"The BCAC approach can give students the tools they need to live in the world of the future."

The Ohio guide explains the BCAC theory and gives directions for designing new units. Our half-hour television tape, *What's an Art Curriculum for, Anyway?*, can also provide help.[5] Nine other states have developed materials to help teachers plan comprehensive art curriculums, and they are available for the asking from state departments of education.[6]

Commercial resources for planning and teaching BCAC units have been proliferating during the last several years. Three that have great potential for overcoming the implementation obstacles are *Discover Art* by Laura Chapman, Davis Publishing Company (elementary school level); *Creating and Understanding Art* by Ernest Goldstein, Gerrard Publishing Company (junior high school level); and *Art in Focus* by Gene Mittler, Bennett McKnight Publishing Company (high school level). Teachers can use these books as student texts or at least as guides to planning the curriculum. They can assist teachers in identifying specific works of art to include in the units. Numerous other resources are available for teaching art history and art criticism (see box). By using these, teachers can cut down the time needed for planning units.

A New Direction

Until more curriculum materials are developed, teachers must rely on existing ones, and on their own bountiful creativity. But teachers who really want to can take steps in this new direction. The BCAC approach can give students the tools they need to live in the world of the future. Instead of being helpless victims of visual images in their lives and undiscerning perpetuators of their collective past, our students can become imaginative and articulate consumers, creators, and builders of the future.□

1. The unit is based on others developed under the direction of the Ohio Department of Education, Columbus.

2. Arthur Efland, *Planning Art Education in the Middle/Secondary Schools of Ohio* (Columbus: Ohio Department of Education, 1977), 7.

3. Manuel Barkan, "Curriculum Problems in Art Education" (Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development, Edward L. Mattil, Project Director, Cooperative Research Project V-002, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University, 1966).

4. Information is taken from an unpublished study presently under way by the Ohio Department of Education, Columbus.

5. Lincoln Pain and Jerry Tollifson, *What's an Art Curriculum for, Anyway?* (Columbus: Ohio Department of Education, 1980).

6. Departments of education in the following states have developed art curriculum materials that reflect the BCAC or DBAE models: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

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