LEARNING DISABILITIES, LITERACY AND ART

Using art to help learning disabled
students improve their literacy skills

Submitted by:

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Abstract

This research paper explores the multiple definitions of learning disabilities and the confusion that arises from them as well as some possible causes of behavioral disabilities. It focuses on the instructional needs of students whose primary learning challenge is processing information from written texts and/or communicating their thoughts and ideas in writing. Interdisciplinary art projects and assignments that encourage and support creative expression that could be assigned in either the English or art classroom are described that can help students improve their reading and writing skills by teaching students how to communicate using visual language run-on. It offers suggestions to clarify the teacher's role when helping learning disabled students, when helping students overcome behavioral issues, and when introducing adaptive strategies to help learning disabled students to feel and be successful.

Identifying Learning Disabilities

The wide and multi-linear spectrum of categories of learning disabilities

Learning disabilities is a complex area of special education because the term "learning disability" covers a wide spectrum of learning challenges that include at least 37 different terms that are in no way universally used or defined (Lockerson & Joynes, 2006). This list includes:

> Attention Deficit Disorder, Atypical Child, Brain Damaged, Brain Injured, Chorieform Child, Developmental Aphasia, Developmentally Imbalanced, Driven Child, Dyslexia, Dysschronous Child, Educationally Handicapped, Interjacent Child, Invisibly Crippled Child, Language Disordered, Learning Disabled, Learning Disordered, Learning Impaired, Minimal Brain Dysfunction, Minimal Cerebral Dysfunction, Organic Brain Syndrome, Performance Deviation, Performance Disabled, Performance Handicapped, Problem Learner, Problem Reader, Psycholinguistic Disability, Psychoneurological Learning Disability, Reading Disability, Remedial Education Case, Special Learning Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Struass Syndrome, and Underachiever (Blackbourn, Patton & Fad, 2004, as cited in Lockerson & Joynes 2006, p. 84). good

Other common terms in use include Brain Injury, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Learning difference/learning difficulties/learning problems, Learning styles/learning modalities, brain-based learning, multiple intelligences. (Lockerson & Joynes, 2006, p. 85).

Limited English Proficiency.

Arguably, the inclusion of English Language Learners with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) to the list of learning disabilities is debatable because proficiency in a first language other than English is a socially constructed challenge students need extra assistance to overcome, rather than a deficiency in their brains' ability to process language-based information.well-said In many cases, the "sociability of children in their first language is the foundation of their intellectual development" (Diaz-Rico, 2008, p. 147). Additionally, the level of advanced proficiency in their first language (p. 149) will significantly affect the ease with which they learn English. In most cases, students categorized as LEP have challenges with language rooted in cultural, geographical and/or situational cases. These challenges are not tied to their cognitive abilities or potential.

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Behavioral Disorders.

While most of the categories listed above identify challenges students face when processing information (chiefly language-based), the category of learning disabilities also includes students who have been assessed as having behavioral challenges such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. (Lockerson & Joynes, 2006, p. 85). In both cases, children have difficulty focusing on tasks or lessons, and in the latter, they are also unable to control the need to move their hands, body, and feet, particularly under stress. There are no concrete tests to determine whether a student is suffering from one of these conditions. It is important to note, however the need for the student to be "familiar with the culture of schooling, including the need to sit still and focus, to follow classroom procedures, and the use pragmatic skills such as manners to

act as a productive member of the class... and intellectual self discipline." (Diaz-Rico, 2008, pp 149-150). It is common for students from many populations who have a higher than average percentage of at-risk students to arrive in school without adequate training to understand that these things are required of them and how to cope when they are asked to do things they don't want to do. Furthermore, the ubiquitously nutrient-poor and sugar-rich diet that is the cause of obesity and health issues in many students can also affect a student's inability to focus in and behave in class.interesting point After a public alternative high school for at-risk students in Appleton, Wisconsin began requiring its students to eat breakfasts and lunches at school rich in "omega-3 fatty acids, dense protein, fresh vegetables and fruit, complex carbohydrates, and freely available water" (Adamek, n.d., para. 10) academic and behavioral issues such as school violence, classroom disruptions, academic underachievement, truancy, and dropout rates "evaporated"now that's interesting! (para. 10). Food allergies may also be contributing to behavioral challenges in the classroom. According to Barlow (2010), the effect of antigens from food allergies can wreak havoc all over the body, affecting the brain, nervous system, hormonal system, kidneys, lungs, and liver may also cause students to experience difficulties learning and controlling their behavior.

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Assessing learning disabilities

The definition of learning disabilities is further complicated by the fact that students who have been identified as having learning disabilities cannot be assessed empirically based on a spectrum of abilityyes as children with other conditions e.g. deafness, autism, or blindness (Lockerson & Joynes, 2006, p. 85) because each child has a "unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses that affect one or more areas of learning

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and/or behavior. (p. 84). The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004's definition of learning disabilities focuses primarily on the student's ability to process language (from listening and reading), process knowledge, and communicate ideas using language or in mathematics (34 CFR 300 as cited in Lockerson & Joynes, 2006, p. 85). According to Geronimus (2010) "Neurophysiologists define a learning disability as a significant discrepancy in test scores. For example, a dyslexic person may have an IQ in the 99th percentile but a reading rate in the 21st percentile" (para. 3)good. Scruggs and Mastropieri (2002) suggest that variability of identification rates of learning disabled students in schools "is considerable and may reflect lack of consistency or precision in identification procedures (p. 156) and argue that "the major problems of identification of learning disabilities — including over-identification, variability, and specificity — can be eliminated by increasing specificity and consistency of state criteria and strict adherence to identification criteria on the local implementation level." (p. 155).

fMRI brain activity monitoring.

Currently, the Center for the Study of Learning in association with the Georgetown Medical Center is using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging to monitor brain activity.

> By using fMRI, we are able to see how the brain is functioning while a person is performing a specific task, such as reading. We are not only able to see differences in the structure of the brain, but can measure differences in brain function and activity as well. This information will ultimately be used to provide a basis for designing more effective interventions and methods for early

identification of learning disabilities like dyslexia. (Center for the Study of Learning, 2010)

If it becomes feasible to periodically monitor the brain activity of children who are struggling in school and identify common patterns in brain activity shared between students with similar learning challenges, it is possible that much of the guesswork and non-standardized names for learning disabilities that are currently in use can be empirically categorized and assessed, allowing for more effective interventions.wonderful to think of how this will help these students in the future

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The social construction of learning disabilities.

Rogers (2003) suggests physical disabilities are socially constructed. She describes a friend who lost all his fingers in his right hand in an accident but was fortunate to have it surgically reconstructed. He can do most things others in his North American community can do. His disability only manifests itself when he goes to China where chopsticks are used instead of forks (which he can't use with his reconstructed hand). (p. 184). It is possible to argue that learning disabilities are similarly socially constructed. IDEA's definition of a learning disability focuses primarily on language and secondarily on math skills. In the 1860's and 1870's Paul Broca and Carl Wernicke discovered that the left-brain controlled our ability to speak and understand language, which "helped to produce a convenient and compelling syllogism. Language is what separates man from beast" great that you were able to check out Daniel Pink(Pink, 2005, Kindle location 184). This by extension, has fuelled the bias that elevates language above all other intelligences in the educational system.

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From an evolutionary standpoint, it is logical that a successful community would include members who have strengths in various communication systems. Each community needs people to teach its children, create beautiful things to decorate its homes with, heal its members when they are sick, fix things when they break, invent new technologies to solve problems or make the community's members' lives more comfortable, grow our food, hunt our food, and so-on. For centuries, the social construct expected children to follow their parents' footsteps career-wise and learning through apprenticeship. It is common for children to inherit talents and aptitudes that their parents have so most of the time, further simplifying this pattern.ah, yes socially definitely…and then that also makes sense on an evolutionary perspective that we inherit these same traits through our DNA…since that would help with our survival as a species.

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Currently, the ecology of skills needed in the American workforce to skills is in a dangerous state of imbalance favoring left-brain language and mathematics-based skills over all others. According PayScale.com (2009 as cited in CNN.com 2009), the top fifty careers with "great pay and growth prospects are

> Systems Engineer, Physician Assistant, College Professor, Nurse Practitioner, Information Technology Project Manager, Certified Public Accountant, Physical Therapist, Computer/Network Security Consultant, Intelligence Analyst, Sales Director, Anesthesiologist, Software Developer, Pharmacist, Occupational Therapist., Nurse Anesthetist, Software Product Manager, Business Analyst, IT, Attorney/Lawyer, Physician/General Practice, Human Resources Manager, Senior Financial Analyst, Physician/Obstetrician/Gynecologist, Clinical Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Veterinarian, Marketing Manager, Speech-Language Pathologist,

> Technical Writer, Finance Director, Telecommunications Network Engineer, Director of Communications, Hotel General Manager, Securities Trader, Account Executive, Education/Training Consultant, Corporate Paralegal, Quality Control Engineer, Manufacturing Engineer, Computer Software Program Manager, Applications Systems Analyst, Senior Internal Auditor, Commercial Property Manager, Creative Director, Pharmaceuticals Sales Representative, Associate - Investment Banking, Training & Development Manager, Product Marketing Manager, Quality Assurance Manager, Financial Research Analyst, Outside Sales Representative (CNN.com, 2009)

Arguably, only one of the jobs on the list, creative director is explicitly geared to right-brain skills that could involve visual, kinesthetic, or musical intelligencesgood. The rest favor left brain skills such as literacy and numeracy that so many learning-disabled students struggle with, leaving them with few viable and/or appealing options. No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) goal to have as close to 100% of America's students functioning at the proficient level as possible appears to be attempting to address this because few of the left-brain, assembly line factory jobs that were once a path to a middle class standard of living still exist. Most have been outsourced to cheaper labor markets overseas, and many of those that still do are at risk of disappearing as well (Hagenbaugh, 2002Daniel Pink also references this). There are some jobs in the trades that can still bring in a middle class wage, but overall, there are not enough of them to fill the need for non-academically based employment. Consequently, in an effort to address this, NCLB forces square pegs in the round holesso true – students whose strengths and/or interests do not

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lie in written language and math are being forced to master them, and teachers are being punished when students do not.

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Learning disabled students and literacy

According to the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002 as cited in Mariage et al, 2008), "an estimated eighty percent of all students with learning disabilities have been placed in special education because they have not learned to read" (p. 44). As mentioned earlier, one of the key definitions of a learning disability according to federal law identifies an "imperfect ability"nice descriptor (34 CFR 300 as cited in Lockerson & Joynes, 2006, p. 85) to understand or use language in its spoken or written forms (including problems with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, and solving mathematical problems). Most of the literature on helping students with literacy who are learning disabled or at-risk targets students who are in primary grades, and its strategies are aligned with what Pink (2005) calls "L-directed thinking... sequential, literal, functional, textual, and analytic... emphasized by schools, this approach is directed by left-brain attributes *toward* left brain results" (Kindle edition location 364). Teachers are advised to use strategies such as scaffolding (based on a linear sequence of skills learned from the simpler to the more challenging and complex) and primarily word-based exercises, even when thematic, cross-curricular units (Cooper-Duffy, Jenkins, 2009, Langer, n.d., Mariage et al, 2009, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010, Walker-Dalhouse et al, 2009).

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Instructional strategies

Teachers are advised to collaborate in teams in order to formulate strategies that will be most effective for the populations they are teaching and for creative differentiated

instructional solutions (Cooper-Duffy, Gerber & Fedorenko, 2006, Jenkins, 2009, Langer, n.d., Mariage et al, 2009, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010, Walker-Dalhouse et al, 2009,). Overall, differentiated instruction was limited to word-based activities that focused on "adjusting instruction according to the students' specific needs rather than following a predetermined skill sequence that may not match students' development" (Walker-Dalhouse et al, 2009 p. 84). This includes whole class and small group instruction, and varying time delays (when a teacher asks a question and waits for students to answer) decreasing the time allotted for students to think as their proficiency increasesinteresting. Individual students' specific needs are based on the student's individual reading level, but not on their aptitudes in other intelligences such as visual, kinesthetic, musical, etc. Students are matched with language-based tasks and texts based on their literacy levels and are allowed to "select materials based on their interests" (p. 85) to scaffold their learning to the next level and incorporate differentiated learning based on socio-cultural factors.

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Downing (2005 as cited in Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010) and Copeland (2007 as cited in Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010) both recommend highlighting the relationship between communication and language/literacy when teaching children how to read. Downing (2005 as cited in Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010) also recommends using "alternative and augmentative communication devices to provide access to literacy". Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer (2010) suggest using "picsym" vocabulary words, teaching materials that show a picture of the object beside the word itself to help students learn to sight read.these statements make a strong argument for the importance of art in helping a student with learning disabilities.

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All of the above suggestions, strategies are text-based and when visuals are included, they are not created by the students ah unfortunate Langer (n.d.) alone describes a teaching strategy in which students create a visual, "vocabulary mobiles" (p. 5) that are displayed in the classroom to further enrich the vocabulary learned in the texts they read and write as well as worksheets they complete. According to Lockerson and Joynes (2006) there is limited research supporting the use of multiple modalities or multiple intelligences to accelerate the achievement of students with learning disabilities (p. 85), which would explain why almost none of the suggested strategies go beyond using the spoken, read, or written word to scaffold students' learning.

Transmediation between modes of communication

According to Lokerson and Joynes (2006) "student deficits may not be apparent in one area of my curriculum while they may be a major roadblock in another" (p. 95). When "David" was asked to write a description of himself, he replied "Drawing is the way I talk" (p. 95). Word-based language is not everyone's natural mode of communication. Emotions and ideas can be communicated using visuals, poses, movements, sounds, and other means.

"Literacy has traditionally been defined simply as learning a set of skills that allow us to read and write." good(Handerhan, 1993, p. 244). People who are unable to do one or both of these have traditionally been labeled ignorant, and by extension, assigned biased labels of having diminished intellectual abilities. In this model, language is privileged above all other cognitive processes in learning (p. 245). If we re-examine

literacy as something that can be expressed aesthetically, the individual can be emphasized in the learning process (p. 246) as opposed to strictly being rooted in the narrow confines of one's abilities to read and write proficiently as a "functionality used in all areas of everyday life" (p. 245).

Alternative Methodologies for Teaching Literacy.

"Many language arts teachers shy away from implementing literacy 'in other forms,' perhaps because 'most elementary teachers know little about the arts and often trivialize them in their classrooms'"really this is something that I argue we each as art educators need to educate our professional community in so that change may occur '(Eisner, 1995, as cited in Albers, 1997, p. 338).

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Visual art offers visually symbolic ways to communicate that go beyond the written word. "Like print-based literacy, as students learn to read art media and create meaning using its techniques and tools, they become enculturated in the symbol systems operating within art". (Albers, 1997, p. 342). When writing is personally meaningful and culturally relevant, students are more actively engaged and intrinsically motivated to perform at higher levels. Student-generated comic booksgood provide students with opportunities to "be creative in the presentation of their writing", (Morrison, Bryan, and Chilcoat, 2002, p. 759), expand their linguistic and visual-spatial intelligences, and to be able to "reveal their understanding in a way that is more compatible with their strengths than if they are limited to traditional forms of expression" (p. 759). Paquette, Fello, and Jalogo's (2007) "Talking Drawings Strategy" (p. 65) uses children's' drawings and oral language to improve their ability to comprehend expository text and for teachers to get a more accurate understanding of students' prior knowledge and assessment of how that

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knowledge has been enhanced or transformed after instruction. Reilly's (2008) English Language Learner students engaged in "nonverbal 'dialogues' where two or more people converse by finger painting" (p. 99) and as a means to fill gaps in communication caused by students' limited or underdeveloped vocabularies (Armon & Morris, 2008).

Semiotic Systems of Communication.

"Art-making, a process of expression and discovery, is about the weaving together of ideas into a unified, coherent creation (Eisner, 1998 as cited in Gamwell, 2005 p. 377). The act of learning could be described the same way. When students are able to weave together analogous and complementary meanings derived from multiple semiotic systems such as language, visual art, and the performing arts, the depth of their knowledge and strength of their interest in and retention of the knowledge is significantly increased.absolutely wonderful (Wilhelm, 1995, Buckelew, 2003 as cited in Barton, Sawyer, & Swanson, 2007 p. 128). Cowan and Albers (2006) demonstrate how literacy is gained through the use of a variety of communication systems, which is strengthened by the transmediation that occurs between them. Barton, Sawyer, and Swanson (2007) used abstract works of visual art to provide concrete texts for students to use to extract abstract meanings from "When abstract ideas are expressed visually, the strategies we use to think abstractly become more understandable" (p. 127) which allowed them to translate this understanding into traditional, written work, "Our goal here was to help students make increasingly complex observations and connections as they moved back and forth between art and text"

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Suggestions and considerations for optimizing the behavior and achievement of learning disabled students

Henry Winkler (2010, as cited in Wilson, 2010) who was diagnosed as an adult with dyslexia says it best: "The best teacher is not necessarily the one who deals with the most facts, but who effectively allows the student to come to grips with the best part of themselves."nice One of the greatest challenges educators face when teaching at-risk students and those with learning disabilities is what Kronowitz (2008) calls "assumed inadequacy" (p. 164). A second challenge (also faced by parents) is giving the learning disabled student the extra support s/he needs without neglecting the needs of the mainstream students. (DeYoung, 2010, para. 4).

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"Cross-cultural studies by anthropologists, for example, highlight the diversity of learning literacies (Handerhan, 1993, p. 246). Albers (1997) describes literacy as something that is and must be "a social undertaking where teachers and students come together in speech and action to create different perceptions of their world. This is an enormous challenge for language arts teachers." (p. 347) however, doing so expands the ways literacy can be demonstrated and expressed beyond the written and read word and into the arts.

There are many ways for teachers to broaden the semiotic systems used to instruct and assess students ability to comprehend, analyze, interpret, and respond to content that extend beyond the linguistic. Oster's (1993) interdisciplinary unit on Sub-Saharan Africa's studio art component "allowed students to express their understanding of the academic material in art work that reflected their personal vision and creativity" (p. 28). Teachers can also broaden the genres of texts they use in their classrooms beyond the traditional literary canon to popular works that incorporate visual-spatial communication such as comic books, TV shows, movies, and so on. They can give students

opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding through popular media similar to projects like Bitz's (2004) "The Comic Book Project. They can also facilitate activities such as Reilly's (2008) "art conversations" to enrich the learning and linguistic skills of all students, not just English language learners.

When strategies such as these are combined with weaving together the knowledge and experiences students bring to the classroom (Dyson, 1990), students are free to make choices and take control of their own learning and creative self expressiongreat, unrestricted by a narrowly defined path set by the teacher. In doing so, students "may be able to reveal their understanding in a way that is more compatible with their strengths than if they are limited to traditional forms of expression." (Morrison, Bryan, & Chilcoat, 2002, p. 759).

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Reducing off-task behavior and discipline challenges

Disruptive and off-task behavior doesn't just hold back the disruptor, it holds back the entire class. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, a teacher's ability to manage classroom behavior and effectively use instructional time are two of the most important skills that are measured in the first two years of teaching prior to tenure being awarded. Teaching literacy, even when using art as an interdisciplinary vehicle for one's lessons can be particularly challenging because most students who have been identified with learning disabilities struggle with literacy and this struggle is a source of deep feelings of frustration and inadequacy within them.

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Classroom rules and routines.

Shores, Gunter and Jack (1993, as cited in Gunter, Couthinho, & Cade, 2002) recommend keeping rules short, limited and simple.

> There should generally be four or five posted rules, which are stated positively regarding observable behavior. These rules should be placed so that each class member can see them and they should present 'clear statements of the positive consequences for following the rules and consequences for rule violation. good(p. 127)

Although these guidelines specifically address the challenges of teaching children with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), they can be effective with any group. The following is an example of a list of rules posted in a special education classroom with students who had behavioral challenges that exemplify the guidelines above:

- Raise your hand and wait for permission to speak
- Follow directions immediately
- Sit in your seat unless you have permission to leave
- Keep your hands, feet, and other objects to yourself
- Use language that does not offend others (Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002, p. 128)

This classroom also used a token system to reward good behavior and provide disincentives for inappropriate behaviorgood. The token system awarded students with play money that could later be exchanged for "tangible items such as books, time playing computer games, and food" (p. 127). When used correctly, such a system has been found to be effective. Behavior is best managed when the classroom is set up to allow the teacher to move easily around the classroom and interact directly and within a relatively close proximity of students (p. 127). It is common and tempting for teachers to want to yell at students from across the room, an ineffective strategy that tends to make

behavioral issues worse as students are firstly personally attacked in front of the class, and secondly, "the students may be trying to use their undesirable social behaviors to terminate academic interactions" (Gunter & Coutinho, 1996, as cited in Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002, p. 128).

It is also crucial that students receive positive feedback from teachersOh absolutely! I find with consistent positive feedback, discipline is rarely an issue! , at least three or four positive interactions for every undesirable interaction (p. 128). To facilitate this, teachers should structure lessons in such a way that they will allow "at least 80% of those [student] responses to be correct" (p. 128) and recommend teachers take the time to teach the material several times if necessary in order to reach the recommended level of correct responses. In this way, the role of the teacher is equally that of a supportive mentor as it is of a facilitator of activities that engage students and build on their existing knowledge and skills.

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Lockerson and Joynes (2006) describe Ramon's success in art class in contrast with his struggles to behave in his other classes. He clearly understood the behavioral expectations and procedures of the art room, was content to avoid participating in class discussions but not disrupt them, and was able to channel his creativity into his artwork (p. 95). Ramon's success in art garnered respect and recognition from both the teachers and his peers and built up his self-esteem. This was used to create a contract system for him in which he was allowed extra time in the art room in exchange for positive behavior in his other classes and the initiative was a success (p. 96). Great case study

Recommendations for assignments and projects

It is essential for assignments to be presented one at a time as opposed to in a packet (p. 128) because doing so avoids overwhelming the students. It's also important to provide work that the students can be successful at because student frustration arising from doing work they cannot master "could contribute to coercive interaction between teachers and students with EBD". This is also true in general with students who are not identified with this particular condition. Open-ended art projects that tie literacy with visual expression are an excellent way to build both literary skills and self-esteem.

Adaptations For students with Learning Disabilities.

Lockerson and Joynes (2006) recommend allowing students to have flexible deadlines as needed. It may be necessary to have multiple versions of a studio project tailored to different attention spans and skill levels, and for quality work to be emphasized over quantity of projects I agree but I do think executing flexible deadlines could become problematic within the current structure of most school systems…for this to work sufficiently I think some major reform in "our thinking" would need to occur. Some students have relatively short attention spans. "If a student's activity is excessive or inattention is a problem... it may be necessary to divide the assignment into several small pieces" (p. 97) or modify it in some other way. Because it is important for students to feel comfortable with their accommodations, Lockerson and Joynes (2002) advise teachers to discuss these accommodations with their students in private.

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It is also advisable to learn as much as possible about one's learning disabled students' strengths, weaknesses, and past failures and successes in order to plan the most appropriate projects for them, have multiple media options available in case one media does not work, give students the opportunity to provide input, avoid pressuring students

to work quickly and precisely, and set clear expectations with the student of "neatness" using (if possible) a work previously created by the student as a point of reference for this conversation (Lockerson & Joynes, 2002, p. 98).

Because students learn differently, allow students to access instructions for the lesson in multiple ways. Create visuals that demonstrate the process step by step accompanied by written instructions (for visual and linguistic learners). Demonstrate the process while giving oral instructions (for visual and audio learners). Have students do quick samples of each step as you demonstrate them (for visual, audio, and kinesthetic learners). It may even be advisable to set up a listening station with an audio recording of the instructions for students who may need to hear them again. This can be set up alongside a copy of the visual instructions so they can follow along with each illustration of each step. Finally, pairing students with peers who can be helpful and supportive when they get confused is ideal whenever possible.

Conclusion

The broad, largely undefined learning and behavioral exceptionalities that fall under the category of "Learning Disabilities" can be overwhelming and confusing to teachers well-put ha ha. Each student's needs is unique, and although creating lessons that will engage them, allow them to be successful, minimize disruptions, and access their individual strengths can be challenging, it is not impossible. Art integration provides students with new avenues for self-expression. In teaching students how to transmediate between visual and written modes of communication, student skills can be weaved and scaffolded, students' self confidence can be built upon alongside their skills. Students can use their strengths in visual communication to help them to improve their weaknesses in

literacy. Teachers need to be empathetic, creative, supportive, flexible, but have clear learning goals in mind that they can guide students toward.

Marcine, once again you have produced an exemplary assignment. Your research is thorough, well-written, and organized in a reader-friendly manner. You investigate many key points on the topic that certainly make for an interesting and educational reading experience. Fantastic work!

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TEACHER'S NAME: Marcine Linder
SCHOOL:
GRADE: 9
DATES:
TIME: four 50-minute periods

TITLE OF LESSON: Using line and shape to express and communicate character

RELATIONSHIP TO THE UNIT: The "bones" of visual communication (line and shape): This lesson introduces the art elements of art and shape and how they are used in popular culture media to visually identify and differentiate good and evil characters. Students create their own original cartoon characters using these concepts and write a brief paragraph describing each character.

RELATIONSHIP TO LIFE
Students at this age are immersed in all facets of popular culture including cartoons and animated images. This activity will make connections between the images they see on television, the internet, film, etc. and how the images have been designed to elicit specific emotional/psychological effects on the viewer. Ideally it will lead them to question and wonder why certain characters were designed they way they are.

This lesson is designed to help students who struggle with writing to create their own visual that they can use to write about character. At this age, many students are intimidated by drawing because they feel pressure to draw realistically and are very self-critical. This exercise makes drawing more accessible by requiring students to use only simple shapes and lines to create imaginative creatures whose manifestation is open-ended. By using their skills in visual perception, students will be able express themselves and improve their ability to share their thoughts and emotions using written text, enhancing their ability to communicate and connect with others.

I. PROBLEM/ACTIVITY

Strategically the expressive qualities of using line and shape only (no value or color) students will create their own original cartoon characters: one good and one evil.

II. GOALS (quoted from the Ontario Curriculum documents for grade nine art)

Students will

Know:

- how to apply the elements and principles of design to their own art,
- how to use critical analysis to examine expression in student and professional artworks;

Understand:

- understand the elements and principles of design as expressive components in their personal and creative works (Ontario grade nine

Be able to:

- apply the elements and principles of design as expressive components in their personal creative works.
- demonstrate an understanding of how the aptitudes and experience required for art careers are applicable in other fields.
- demonstrate the ability to create representational, abstract, and non-objective artworks that convey ideas or concepts (e.g., warmth, conflict).

III. OBJECTIVES

- Understand the function of line and shape as both a design and expressive element in art
- Use the most basic building blocks of art: line and shape to express a character's personality original cartoon characters
- Express themselves visually (their interests, aesthetic taste, humor, etc.) through their cartoon character
- Express their ideas in writing based on the drawings they created

IV. INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS

Quotes:

- "When 'David' was asked to write a description of himself, he replied 'Drawing is the way I talk'" (Lokerson & Joynes, p. 95)
- "Like print-based literacy, as students learn to read art media and create meaning using its techniques and tools, they become enculturated in the symbol systems operating within art". (Albers, 1997, p. 342).
- "Cross-cultural studies by anthropologists, for example, highlight the diversity of learning literacies (Handerhan, 1993, p. 246)
- "When abstract ideas are expressed visually, the strategies we use to think abstractly become more understandable" (Barton, Sawyer, & Swanson, 2007, p. 127)

Formal Concepts:

- Line can be used to add expressive as well as decorative details
- Shape can be used to form the contours of a cartoon character's body and face as well as express his/her personality

Artistic Behaviors:

- Introducing children to art develops their visual awareness and provides a springboard for personal image-making.
- Previsualization helps students develop imagination and conceptual thinking
- Experimentation helps children to develop creative problem solving skills, divergent thinking skills, self expression, and self reflection leading to self evaluation

V. RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

Resources

- Power Puff Girls character images: Powerpuff Girls, the Professor, Mojo Jojo, Him
- Star Wars Character images: R2D2, C3P0, Darth Vader
- *Enchanted* poster (2007 Walt Disney Film)

Materials

- laptop or desktop computer and LCD projector (ideal) OR overhead projector and transparencies with Power Puff Girls character images, Star Wars character images, and 2007 Walt Disney *Enchanted* poster photocopied onto them
- hand-outs with photocopies of all the characters and the movie poster
- glue sticks (to glue the hand-outs into their sketchbooks)
- sketchbooks (students are responsible for bringing these to class), have loose sheets of plain white 8.5"x11"paper on had for those who forget
- pencils (students are responsible for bringing these to class), have extras on hand for those who may forget
- fine tip markers (class set)

VI. MOTIVATION

Soft, comforting music is playing when the students enter the room. They are asked to sit down quietly and reflect on their day. How are they feeling? Happy? Anxious? Excited? Bored? etc. As they are reflecting and the music is playing they are asked to draw a picture (can be an abstract design or a representational image) that represents how they are feeling. At the bottom of the drawing, they are to write a few words describing the emotion they have just represented in their drawing.

VII. QUESTIONS

Topic Questions

Line is the basic building block and starting point of drawing What are the different types of lines? (*straight, curved, zigzag, bold, fine, dotted, etc*.)
Do different types of lines (straight vs. curved vs. zigzag/diagonal) communicate different emotions?
At what point does a line become a shape? (e.g. how thick does it have to be? Do lines only become shapes when they enclose them as a contour?)

Association Questions

Are there lines that exist in nature? What other objects in the room create lines?

Are there shapes that exist in nature? What other objects in the room create shapes?

Can you think of examples of lines in nature that are scary? innocent? boring? strong? other?

Can you think of examples of shapes in nature that are scary? innocent? boring? strong? other

Visualization Questions

(LCD projector images are shown, hand-outs distributed and one glue stick for each table so students can glue hand-outs into their sketchbooks)

Cartoonists and character designers use line and shape as the basic building blocks of their drawings. (Show Powerpuff Girls, Star Wars, and Disney artworks on the screen and direct the students to the images on their hand-outs as well).

Which characters in these images are good? How do you know? (describe the lines and shapes they are made up of).

Which characters in these images are evil? How do you know? (describe the lines and shapes they are made up of).

Why do you think circles and curved lines seem to denote innocent/good characters and diagonal/zigzag/pointed lines and shapes seem to denote evil characters?

Transition

Now that we have seen some common examples, Look at the drawing you just created to reflect your mood. Do the lines and shapes in it correspond to what we have discovered in the cartoon/popular culture images we have just examined?

VIII. PROCEDURES

Day 1

Demonstration (5 minutes)

Teacher demonstrates how a good character and an evil character can be created using basic shapes (circles, squares, triangles and filled in with different kinds of line). Students are told they will have to come up with names for their characters and write short paragraphs describing each of them at the end of the lesson. They are encouraged to start thinking about the answers to these questions as they draw.

Accommodations

A frame by frame visual representation of each step the instructions (with large, bold numbers beside each step) is posted at the front of the room. Short, succinct written instructions are below each step. Students will be encouraged to follow the demonstration by copying what the teacher has

done (or something similar) into their notebooks to get a feel of what happens in each step.

Students with accommodations will also be given a checklist that has smaller copy of each of the illustrated steps and descriptions (with a checkbox next to each step). They are to glue this into their sketchbooks. Students will be asked to check off each step as they complete it, and write down the date and time it was completed so they can keep track of their progress.

A listening station with an audio file stored on an MP3 player with headphones of the spoken directions will also be available for audio-based learners to listen to as they look at the illustrated, succinct, numbered instructions if the get confused.

Students are reminded that they can each earn up to three tokens (toward the weekly prizes for good behavior, participation, and co-operation) by doing the following each day:

1. Being on-time and prepared with all necessary materials
2. Staying on task and not distracting others from working
3. Being co-operative

Bonus tokens may be awarded for

- Showing a positive leadership role in class by helping others who may be struggling but who the teacher has not yet had a chance to help

Work Period

Students will brainstorm three ideas for a good character and three ideas for an evil character and draw them as thumbnail sketches in their notebooks. Teacher circulates around the classroom to give individual support and feedback on their work.

Closure (3-5 minutes)

Students are called up/volunteer to share their experiences creating their characters and their rough sketches with the class

Day 2

Instructions (3-5 minutes)

The teacher will explain to students that today they will be choosing their best thumbnail sketches of their good and evil characters and developing them into polished line and shape based drawings (no value or color yet... this will follow in subsequent lessons in this unit)

Work Period (Days 2-3)

Students work until five minutes before the end of the class period. When they have completed their pencil drawings, students go over them with

black fine-tip markers, and mount and display their completed drawings and written descriptions.
Teacher circulates to give feedback and support to the students

Closure (10-15 minutes)

Students write short paragraphs describing the characters they have created: What are their names? Which one is good? Which one is evil? What kinds of things do they like? Hate? What are each of their goals? Dreams? etc.

IX. EVALUATION

To be completed during Day 4. The class is will engage in a "gallery walk" around the room to examine each other's work. Students will comment on the work of their peers and discuss the relationships between the drawings and the descriptions of the characters in the drawings. Following the gallery walk, each student will write a 1 – 2 paragraph reflection/journal entry about the experience of creating these drawings and looking at the drawings of their peers.

Students are evaluated on how well they were able create visuals and written descriptions that communicated character. They will also be evaluated on the overall use of line and shape to create an aesthetically strong drawing.

Students who used checklists to mark their progress will also receive reward tokens for completing them and turning them in.

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