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Mags Ryder

Head of Art and Head of Year 7 at Bolton School, Boys' Division. Bolton.

@mags_ryder @BSBDArt LinkedIn: Mags Ryder

Current EdD Year 3 student at the Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds.

My current research explores student quietness within the classroom setting and its benefits to a successful teaching and learning environment.

Sustaining and growing subject passion: What can be learnt from the artist teacher?

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An autoethnographic article outlining my basic need to create, linking personal experience with broader teaching and learning issues.

We began teaching our subjects to pass on our knowledge and passion, but with our busy daily working and personal lives we sometimes forget to 'feed' the very fire that began all those years ago. When the pedagogy and syllabus knowledge begin to embed, how might we revisit our passion for the subject we studied for so many years? Upon reading Szekely (1978), it became clear that the role of the 'artist teacher' is an important one to study.

My story begins several years ago and I remember the moment clearly. It was the Glastonbury Festival weekend in 2014 and I was enjoying the creative spectacle. I was contemplating the art that I wished I had more time to create, so I simply decided to get a new sketchbook and try to complete a drawing every day for the next week.

I have always created whilst I have taught, but haphazardly. Ball (1990) supports my thought that my teaching was supported by my understanding of what it is to create, including the joys and pains of making. I have always kept 'school sketchbooks', documenting every scheme written and taught, presenting my demonstration pieces from over the past 23 years of teaching art.

'To be a teacher one needs to be outgoing, analytical and confident. The introspection which is often characteristic of the artistic temperament must be set aside as the teacher focuses on the needs of his/her students. Teachers must evaluate art, student behavior; they must teach and verbalise the internal processes of the artist.' (Ball, 1990, p. 54) It is this very juxtaposition that I enjoy: a busy day at school followed by a quiet moment of creating.

Szekely (1978, p. 17) states that 'the artist teacher who is continuously growing as an artist and a pedagogue appears to be the best hope'. So this idea of creating every day was different to me – a real challenge. Over the next seven days I completed a drawing every day and, with a library date stamp on order, every piece of progress was recorded in time.

As the seven days progressed, I quickly realised that creating a finished piece every day was near impossible. So began my 365 Sketchbook, a blank sketchbook that I named, in which I would produce a little creative work every single day – although it was imperative that this was not 'work' and must remain enjoyable.

A normal day can contain inspiration and the biggest development came on a normal day. At the end of a Year 7 acrylic painting lesson, I noticed the mess left on the protective newspaper layer and asked the boys to pile them up as I wanted to create a collage from the leftovers. Then the questions began and a promise from me to show them what I had created the following week. It then dawned on me that it was time to share my practice. 'The teacher's primary concern is that of learning.' (Anderson, 1981, p. 45) But this can be for one's self as well as for our students. It is extremely important to note Daichendt's (2009, p. 33) writings that in fact 'these two activities – teaching and making art – actually support... one another, despite being difficult to balance'. Thornton (2013) discusses how the two roles can lie side by side. My approach of 'a little, often' seemed to be a logical approach but only time would tell.

Lots of people, museums and art galleries have provided starting points for work; however, it has been Sketchbook Circle that has been invaluable for finding like-minded spirits. Sketchbook Circle is an established collaborative project that connects art teachers. Creating for joy and collaborative sharing is backed by Ball (1990, p. 54), who states how he also appreciates 'the sheer joy that only art can bring – art for myself's sake'. My fundamental aim is this – creating for joy. It is not work and I never struggle for ideas – in fact, it is the opposite; I have too many – so keeping a list helps to queue things 'out of my head'. I enjoy learning new techniques, both manual and digital, as Ball (1990, p. 54) reminds us that 'the teacher needs to teach many media, many techniques'. I would agree also with Daichendt (2009, p. 33) that the 'artist teacher represents a more inclusive and richer understanding of the multi-faceted aspects of teaching art'.

The 365 Club at school recently gained its one-hundredth member. We meet on a weekly basis, producing individual work in a collaborative environment. A 'creative station' – a desk, a couple of chairs and some art materials – outside the art department allows sitters a moment to sit and create for pleasure.

We could list every character trait that we are trying to develop in our young people today and they would be put into action if someone was to begin and sustain a personal 365 Project. It could be a CPD piece and inspiration for the able, gifted and talented. The 365 Project is an embryonic working model: a series of personal sketchbooks that tell the story of creative habit – the need and desire to create on a daily basis. This approach is not a rigid one; it exemplifies a simple process that demonstrates how working on something a little at a time can result in huge benefits, and if it inspires us, as teachers, to continue to push ourselves and learn, it brings us full circle by growing and maintaining our subject passion and feeding the fire that began all those years ago.

References

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Do you
make time
to

CREATE

? ?
? 365.3 ?
sketchbook

? ? ?
? ? ?

28th June

2016



2017

27th June

sketchbook

366
sketch
book

28th June
to 2015 to
27th June
2016

365 sketchbook

On the 28th June 2014 I began
a new sketchbook. The idea was
to write in it every day
for a whole year. I have so
far kept this promise to myself.
Adding drawings, paintings, collages,
photographs, sketches, anything that
comes to mind. It began as a
visual diary of my day but
soon developed into an emptying
of my creative mind. I hope
that in sharing these very
personal pages I can...

...inspire you to

CREATE on a
daily basis. It takes discipline
but nothing has to be completed
in a day. I am determined it
will be enjoyable and does not become
a chore. So, whether it is
my World of Art, or in the form
of a writing, or poetry journal,
music or dance ideas, or maybe
a travel journal.
Any creative
outpour is a good thing!



