



Crayons and the Classroom

Sydney Gureqwitz Clemens said that “art has the role in education of helping children become more like themselves instead of everyone else.” With the emphasis on testing in modern education, students have been taught to “standardize” themselves. Classrooms in the Arts however, provide opportunity to get away from this.

In this mindset of becoming more individualized, the classroom can be thought of as a box of crayons. The box consists of a variety of colors, each different, but all valuable. While each crayon within the box provides a role, it takes all the colors combined and working together to complete the picture. This is just as true in a classroom - each student is different. As a teacher, we acknowledge that our students learn differently, have different interests, and are their own unique person. Therefore, education ought to be individualized to an extent. The classroom is also a place to celebrate these differences because each unique person completes the “box”, or classroom.

Broken crayons tend to be of concern to children. However, it is important to recall that broken crayons still color. There may be students in the classroom who feel broken, perhaps those who have a disability or those determined to be at-risk. Often, these students feel that because they may not learn like their peers that they are “broken” and incapable of achieving the same goals. This is a lesson on attitude. I believe teacher and student attitude are one of the biggest factors that impact the overall success of a classroom. Assuming a crayon cannot color because it is broken does not set a positive and motivational atmosphere. Instead, by taking on a growth mindset, teachers can show students how to think positively towards themselves, others, and challenging situations. A shift in “I can’t” becomes “I can’t *yet*” or “mistakes help me learn”. A growth mindset meets the students where they are and positively encourages and challenges them to consistently keep pushing themselves to improve.

It is often debated how teacher-directed a classroom should be. I believe education is most successful when the teacher acts as the guide on the side. However, this does not mean students have free range of the room. Crayons come in a box, sometimes they are used to color inside the lines, and sometimes they are used more creatively, but with no structure we risk losing them. The box adds an element of order to all of the crayons just as the teacher provides a framework for the lesson. However, there needs to be a necessary balance of student freedom within the teacher direction. This encourages the individuality of each student and reinforces that there are multiple ways to meet the same end goal. 21st Century skills revolve around creativity, problem solving, and collaboration. Following a color by number is not going to emphasize these goals. A teacher is there to set students up for success with necessary and appropriate guidelines that push the students towards their goals while also encouraging and providing additional assistance when necessary.

VanGogh described color as the “enthusiasm in life”, and to teachers, students are the enthusiasm in our classrooms. Stifling this enthusiasm hurts everyone, but encouraging it promotes individuality, friendship, and growth for all, the teacher included because we ourselves also always have room to grow along with our box of crayons.