What Can Arts Teachers Teach the Rest of Us?

Arts teachers can demonstrate constructing lessons that teach students to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.

Arts teachers use methodologies that involve a kind of cognition that integrates feeling and thinking and, in the process, makes them inseparable. This kind of teaching enables us to become qualitatively intelligent. It requires learning to ask not only what someone is saying, but how someone has constructed a thought or idea.

Arts teachers celebrate multiple perspectives.

Arts teachers use pedagogy that presents problems which usually have more than one solution and questions often have more than one answer. From them, we can learn that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.

Arts teachers can help to expand what is learnable and knowable.

Words in their literal form and numbers are only a part of what we are capable of knowing. Arts teachers make vivid the fact that the limits of spoken language do not begin to approach the limits of our cognition.

Arts teachers provide tools for learning.

Arts teachers offer experiences that develop habits of mind such as persistence, decision making and reflective self-evaluation. In addition, imbedded in the study of the arts are skills such as observing, envisioning, and innovating through exploration.

In sum, arts teachers can help develop a direction for education in which more importance is placed on exploration than on discovery, and more attention is devoted to what is distinctive than to what is standard. Arts teachers can lead the way to an educational model that has a greater focus on becoming than on being, and places highest value on imaginative in a factual world. Arts teachers can help create a model of teaching in which a way of knowing assigns greater priority to valuing than to measuring, and regards the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached.

David Coleman, 2011