

Background Research

Aiming a website at kids for the purpose of getting them involved with arts seemed pretty taunting, but a little research reminded me why I want to do it and gave me some insight into how to be effective.

Going to Oakland public schools for all of my primary education I know first hand that there is a distinct lack of arts in many schools. For me it was a struggle because I loved art, but had very little guidance and didn't feel prepared for applying to secondary schools with a portfolio limited to messy, random personal projects.

Valerie Strauss, on the other hand, extracted from a book by Lisa Philips some of the developmental reasons that art is so important for kids, especially as education has become so polarized toward STEM subjects. She says art teaches 10 things: creativity, confidence, problem solving, perseverance, focus, non-verbal communication, receiving constructive feedback, collaboration, dedication, and accountability. These are all really important things that I have noticed I now use in my daily life in school, at work, and with my family and friends. I feel like I can attribute most of my success to my love for art and I want that for all students.

The next question then is how to get students into arts. I was never reluctant to pick up a pencil and start drawing something, but part of the reason that many students don't have experience with art is because they are uninterested and do not seek other opportunities when art isn't available in school. Charlina Stewart recommends 3 ways to get very young kids interested in arts. First, they need to be provided with materials. Kids won't create if they feel like they have nothing to create from or with. In my experience, people are surrounded by more materials for art than we realize, but my website can do it's part in showing students where to find materials and getting them connected to resources. Second, kids should be able to view art. Stewart suggests taking kids to art museums and encouraging them to think about the art and what other artists' intentions might be. A website could provide a free alternative to a museum, and could provide the opportunity for kids to see other students' art as well as professional art. Third, Stewart recommends reading wordless picture books. This encourages kids to make up stories and draw connection to build their creativity. Giving students the opportunity to create there own picture books and sharing their interpretations can greatly benefit their development.

My biggest concern for the effectiveness of a website targeted at kids has been how to make it easy to navigate and use. Confirming my concerns, Trine Falbe writes "Kids spend a lot of time online, and their cognitive and physical limitations present many challenges to them when they do so." Falbe has done some research, however, and has set some ground rules for making websites that are kid friendly. In order to work around the fact that kids are at an early point in language development and

are much better at understanding symbols and visual queues, Fable suggests some ways to keep a website from relying on text:

- Keep data entry simple and to a minimum. Motor-skills and language-skills probably aren't at a stage conducive to lots of typing.
- Use buttons as apposed to text links. Buttons have more surface area and may require less reading.
- Use images and icons instead of, or along with words as often as possible.
- Don't move things around on the screen. Consistency will help with navigation of the site.
- Use voiceovers to clue kids into what's going on.
- Design for kids to be social. This can either be through the internet, or to interact with the site in the same space.
- Design for playfulness. Make a game out of the content to keep kids engaged.

These ideas have given me a lot more confidence going into this project and have brought up some ideas that hadn't occurred to me before. Ultimately, I am convinced that website for kids' art is not only possible, but important.

Bibliography

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