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# A shout out about Teaching for Artistic Behaviour [TAB]

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**Key words:** Artistic behaviour, choice, 21st century skills, teaching

**I never, ever, thought I'd be that teacher—the one you hear screaming at the kids in their class from half a mile away—until I became one.**

**I'm not a shouter. At least I wasn't a shouter until, after over 20 years teaching in high schools, I began working as a specialist art teacher in a primary school.**

**How did I move from good behavioural management strategies and a working pedagogy in the high school art room to bored, non-compliant behaviour in the primary school? How did I find my way back from hating art classes as much as the kids did to an environment where we all are engaged, look forward to and love what we do?**

## How it happened!

Subscribing to many art Facebook pages, it was only a matter of time before the 'fb algorithm' locked into my interest. Teaching for Artistic Behaviour (TAB) appeared on my side bar and, after clicking on the page, a pedagogy and practice was discovered that completely changed my perception of teaching art and I joined a community of over 440 TAB teachers.

I devoured books and articles on TAB/choice based education, scoured the TAB website and haunted the TAB Facebook page. There were many 'Aha' moments, but it was this phrase that gelled for me: 'The real product of art education is not the works of art, but the child...What you need to do as a teacher of art is create kids who make good art, create kids who think well as artists, who have an artistic mind.'

There was no turning back. I don't know the context of this Arundhati Roy (n.d.) quote: "The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it," but I saw it, I couldn't un-see it.

Although this article is about my research into and experiences and understanding of TAB in the primary school, this pedagogy has been successfully implemented in middle schools in the USA since the 1970s.

## A quick introduction to TAB

"Teaching for Artistic Behaviour is a grassroots organisation developed by and for teachers and supports choice based art education. The concept emerged over 30 years ago in Massachusetts classrooms through the need for more authentic art making experiences" (TAB, n.d.a, para. 5). Its tenant embraces the 'students as artists' (TAB, n.d.b, para. 2.)

"The essential goal of art teaching, (is) to inspire children to behave like artists—to try on the artist's role—to feel what it is to gather an art idea on one's own and act on it. The goal is to reveal to children that art comes from within themselves—not from the teacher. The goal is to demystify art, and assure children, through the teacher's deeds and words, that art is found in familiar places and ordinary environments, accessible to everyone. It is to bring children closer to art—nearer to themselves, to their own views and visions" (Szekely, n.d., para. 1).

It is to acknowledge the student as Artist.

## The student as artist

In a TAB, choice based, Art studio, "Children take ownership of the art ideas they are developing. The teacher's role shifts from authoritarian to enabler, facilitator, consultant, coach and collaborator" (Gaw, 2003, para. 1).

Students "experiment with the materials and techniques of the artist, work with materials they love, and engage with ideas in personally meaningful ways. Additionally, learners in a studio setting collaborate with other artists, explore, try, fail, practice, dream, and reflect. These experiences, practices and behaviours define the work of the artist ..." (Hathaway, 2013, p. 13).

This pedagogy enables students to "...rehearse and practice the kinds of personal explorations they can make on their own outside of class. From this point of view, art class is not the ultimate destination for our students' activity as artists but simply the launch pad where we give them the impetus and directions to take off on their own" (k, 2003)..'

Typically this activity occurs in 'Centres.'

“*Children take ownership of the art ideas they are developing. The teacher's role shifts from authoritarian to enabler, facilitator, consultant, coach and collaborator*”

## Centres

Centres are a core classroom TAB practice. A Centre is “a three-dimensional lesson plan” (TAB, n.d.c) because the components are embedded in the centres. There are materials in the centre and also information on how to set up those materials. That sort of information is right there, put in a way that the students can access the materials without any adult’s help.

Centres are dedicated to different art materials and mediums. In my Art room, on any given day, up to five centres operate. Everything the student needs is readily available at the Centre of their choice. Like choice at a buffet meal, students visit Centres, thus initiating and continuing their work uninterrupted.

When students are encouraged to create freely, following their interests and dreams in their own way, unique work emerges from the Centre of their choice.

## What does a choice based art studio and lesson look like?

### The space

The TAB Art studio can look as simple as trays on a trolley wheeled into a class, but preferably into a purpose-built room. In my early years of teaching TAB I shared a space with the Music teacher, later I had the privilege of a room set aside just for Art. As the school expanded TAB happened in the library. This year I use the K-2 classroom.

In each situation I set up Centres dedicated to different art materials and mediums. On any given day there might be up to five centres operating where everything the student needs is readily available so that they can work independently and uninterrupted.

### The lesson

#### Teacher involvement

Each lesson begins with a few minutes on the carpet reminding students which Centres are open, the Studio Habit (more about them later) we are highlighting, or I might read an Art-centred children’s picture book, before we move to a table for a very short demonstration connected in some way to an existing, or a to-be-opened-that-lesson, Centre. It might be a skill like tying a knot, applying strips of papier mâché to a sculpture, attaching cardboard to cardboard, an introduction to new materials like oil pastels, waking up tempera blocks, printing with found materials, watching a video or discussing an artist’s work. Once the demonstration is over students explore the demonstration further, or work on their Art at any of the Centres.

## Student activity

Students engage best at Centres where the Centre and the process are clearly labelled—for example a cardboard attachment poster at the Construction Centre or ‘blending with watercolours’ poster at the Painting Centre—and easy to find. (This also makes cleaning up easier.)

Peers are quick to help fellow artists find materials or solve a problem. Peer learning is key to the TAB process; the teacher is no longer the font of all knowledge. It’s incredible what happens when I’m at a Centre and a student asks me a ‘how to’ question, I throw it over to their peers and they have great suggestions. Yes, there will always be students who can’t be bothered trying for themselves of looking for materials, expecting me to do their Art for them, or find what they want for them. They learn quickly enough that I will not pick up a pencil or a brush and do it for them and, as far as finding materials, the most they’ll get from me are directions to the appropriate Centre.

Students in a TAB Studio have many opportunities to assess their own work, to decide if it is complete, to decide on the direction of their next piece and to decide if their work will be displayed. This is an assessment challenge and most students want to take their work home. I ask for Artist’s Statements for some work and take photos of the students work before it goes home.

“They learn quickly enough that I will not pick up a pencil or a brush and do it for them and, as far as finding materials, the most they’ll get from me are directions”



Figure 1 Acacial and Kaylee talking about their work (Grades 3 and 6, 2018)



Figure 2 Esther and Emily collaborating on a shopping complex made from waste materials

My school is investigating using Seesaw (<https://web.seesaw.me>) for students to upload portfolios of their work.

### Classroom management

TAB teachers approach classroom management differently. I allow students to sit wherever they like and use one or many Centres, transporting materials from Centres to their table. I don't set themes but encourage students to create from their imagination, observation, memory, class demos and artist discussions.

Some students stay at the same centre all year. In my classes this is particularly true for the Drawing and Construction Centres. I don't discourage this kind of engagement as I observe different ideas form and develop in complexity. I always have at least one 3D option open and, for the K-2 class, a box of blocks for building. Photographs are taken of ephemeral art and, in the case of the Building Centre, a sketch of the finished creation is required.

Cleaning time is an evolving challenge. My latest strategy—and I think it's working—is to call the class to the mat for our critique session before we clean up. Clean up is hard for the students because they have to stop working on their art. (I do give a 10, then 5, then 1 minute count down so that, with a bit of luck, more paints aren't used and their minds just might segue into the 'I have to leave this soon mode.')

Katherine Douglas a co-founder of *Teaching for Artistic Behavior, Inc.* and also a co-author with Jaquith of *Engaging Learners through Artmaking* (2009), taught in an elementary choice-based art program for over 35 years and was awarded Massachusetts Art Educator of the Year in 2016. She suggests placing a photograph, perhaps with little arrows pointing out details, in each Centre showing

a clean Centre, so that it's really clear where each material "lives." Katherine further advises adopting a positive attitude, "Quietly rejoice that you have students who care so much about their work that it is difficult to stop working... praise their commitment, and brainstorm ways they can do their work and care for the centre that they love" (Facebook post - closed group, 1 January 2018).

Some teachers use clean up songs. I love that one but I often find myself saying, "I'm not your mother" to encourage engaged involvement.

### Critique, self and peer assessment

A critique session can be as simple as a student talking about their work, peers asking questions or one-on-one teacher evaluation. Questions like these are displayed to guide students in peer evaluation.

- What was your biggest challenge?
- What Studio Habits did you use?
- How do you plan to use this work?
- Is this created for anyone special?
- Why did you choose to make this?
- What techniques did you use?
- What advice would you give to someone doing this project?
- Are you planning to make anything else to go with this work?
- What was your favourite part of making this?
- Where (how) did you get this idea?
- Have you ever made anything similar to this before?
- How is this different?

“Some teachers use clean up songs. I love that one but I often find myself saying, “I’m not your mother” to encourage engaged involvement.”



Figure 3 Art game play by Matthew and Ben

- How is it similar?
- What did this teach you?
- What next?
- How do you plan to display this work?
- Did anything surprise you about what you ended up with?
- How do you know when you were done?
- What do you like about what you created?
- What do you wonder?
- What do you like best?

Some teachers do “gallery walks” where each child puts their work on the carpet and the class slowly walk around the carpet noticing things.

### The studio habits of mind (SHoM or SHoTM)

The Studio Habits form a core rationale for the TAB classroom. For the purposes of conserving space I will simply list them.

- Develop Craft.
- Engage & Persist.
- Envision.
- Express.
- Reflect.
- Stretch & Explore.
- Understand the Arts Community.

I have each separate SHoM displayed on the wall as a poster, with a fat arrow pointing to the habit we are concentrating on for that lesson, and both introduce or discuss it. During a lesson I might encourage a student who is Engaging and Persisting using those words so that the concept becomes imbedded in their thinking.

### Challenges to implementing TAB

The initial challenge is clearly communicating the benefits of TAB and gaining the support of your school community. Once they are on board, deciding on the centres you will open will determine how you design the layout of your room. Chapter 2 in *Engaging Learners Through Art Making* (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009), is dedicated to the learning environment. Other similar resources are *The Learner Directed Classroom* (Jaquith & Hathaway, 2012), *Choice Without Chaos* (Bedrick, 2012), *Studio Thinking 2* (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2013), the TAB website (<http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org>) and lurking, searching and asking questions on the TAB Facebook pages are brilliant places to familiarise yourself with the pedagogy, discover how others have implemented their curriculums and what that might look like when connected to the Australia Curriculum.

Moving from teacher directed/project based lessons to choice-based lessons that give the

student ownership of what they will do and how they will do it requires the teacher to continually identify who is in control: you or the student? When the focus of control moves from teacher to student control of the process, and lessons are organised around providing opportunities for play, experimentation and risk taking, rather than producing a polished final product student engagement increases because the content of their art is personal and relevant. Ownership of this nature enables students to assess their own work, make decisions about what direction they will take it until, in their opinion it is finished, what will be tackled next and what will be displayed.

Downplaying extrinsic motivators like grades allows room for intrinsic motivators like curiosity, play, the freedom to make personally relevant choices which increase student engagement, personal relevance and thus creativity.

Students are expected to find an idea, select materials and techniques, arrange materials and tools, pace themselves, create an image or structure,

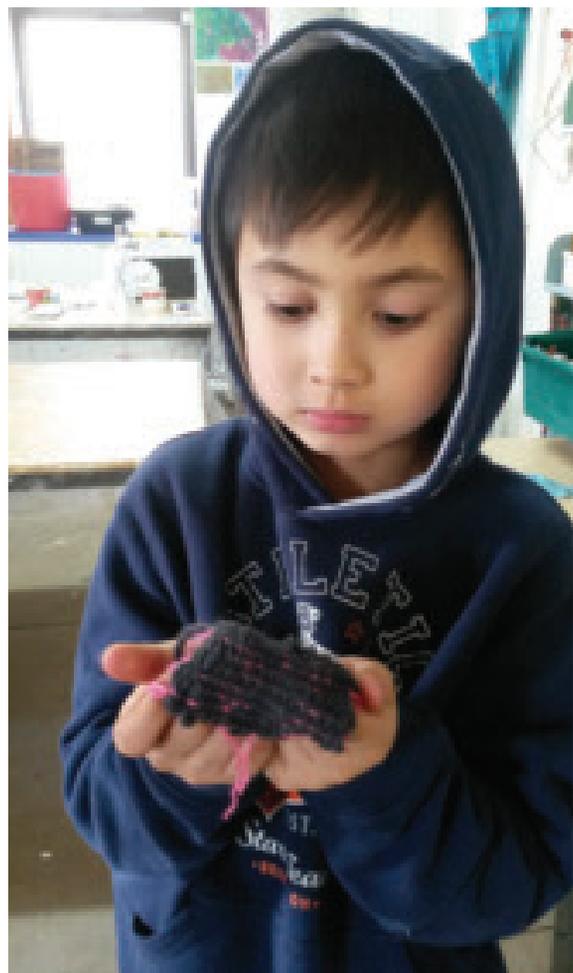


Figure 4 Corrin Cheong with his weaving

“Ownership ... enables students to assess their own work, make decisions about what direction they will take it until, in their opinion it is finished, what will be tackled next and ... be displayed.”

overcome obstacles, return materials and tools, discuss artwork and reflect on progress. The real product of art education becomes, not the works of art, but the child.

Choice Studio classrooms offer safe spaces for students to express and process their unique ideas and feelings. George Szekely (1988) cited in (k, 2003, para. 17), asserts they are risk-taking spaces where "... students rehearse and practice the kinds of personal explorations they can make on their own outside of class." Experiencing teaching in this TAB modality confirms it. Implemented in a Christian school context, it enables significant social learning including: ethical cooperative relationships, emergent 21st Century skills and a practical understanding of democracy (Gaw, 2015; Gaw, 2017; Teaching for Artistic Behaviour, 2009). **TEACH**



Figure 5 Lucas talking about his collage (2017)

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## Biographic details

**Valerie Clark** is an art teacher who has been teaching Art in the private education sector since 1975. Her training is in Fine Arts (Secondary), Curriculum Development and Biblical Studies. Her teaching experience until 2011 was as a secondary teacher in SA and the NT grades 8-12. In 2010 she started to teach K-6 Art and struggled to engage kids and teach Art in a way that was meaningful to them. In 2011 she discovered Teaching for Artistic Behaviour (TAB) resulting in teacher and students enjoying Art classes.

You can find out more about it here: <http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org/>

“  
[TAB] enables significant social learning including: ethical cooperative relationships, emergent 21st Century skills and a practical understanding of democracy”