STUDENTS NEED TO FIND THEIR VOICE:
5 WAYS TO USE THE POWER OF THE ARTS

By Robin Williams

Students need to find their voice. In this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, trauma, racism, rioting, protesting, and violence, students need the arts as a positive outlet for their emotions. Our students need the arts and a way to express themselves.

The Universal Design for Learning framework encourages the use of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression for students (CAST, 2018). Incorporating the arts into the online learning environment and traditional classroom may foster flexibility, connection and openness, critical thinking, and humor, as well as facilitate conversations about emotionally challenging themes while increasing accessibility for all learners (Sajnani et al., 2020). Here are five tips for new teachers to intentionally incorporate student voice into the classroom, regardless of whether the classroom is traditional or online.

1. **Inspire creative writing.**
   A high school English teacher recently told me her goal as a teacher was to help students find their voice. Empowering students to have a healthy outlet to share thoughts, feelings, concerns, and dreams is essential, especially during the pandemic. Writer's Workshop and Author's Circles can allow students to share creative writing with their peers. In the virtual environment, students can use Google Slides, digital portfolios, Flipgrid, and Google Classroom to showcase their writing.

2. **Document today.**
   Encourage students to document today. We are living in history and, someday, the social studies textbooks will reflect on the pandemic of 2020 and the civil unrest in America and around the world. Documentation can occur through photography, poetry, digital portfolios, journaling, and more. Focus on the power of creating. The creative process can be healing for students and adults. Be vulnerable. Be honest. Be authentic. Be you. Your story and the stories of your

> **Effective co-teaching does not happen by accident; it's the result of continuous, deliberate, and thoughtful planning and reflecting between co-teachers.**

students will shape this rising generation of students who are our future leaders.

3. Make music matter.

During the pandemic, many organizations have offered visual arts competitions as a way for students to express themselves. My daughter, who was in fifth grade, entered a competition weekly. She found her voice through composing original songs on the flute and piano, creating a stage for her handmade puppets out of a pizza box, learning how to dance with her heart, creating her first podcast, and performing a one-person play. First graders made homemade instruments out of beans, rice, paper plates, and water bottles. Students collaborated on Zoom to blend voices into powerful songs. Give your students the opportunity to explore music to find their voice.

4. Embrace visual and performing arts.

Use reader's theaters to teach ELA. Have students act out their favorite parts of chapter books. Use graphic arts, painting, animatronics, found art, upcycling, 3D printing, Tinkercad, Scratch.mit, and Google CS First Coding to have students explore and create. Showcase art in a virtual-arts festival, multi-purpose room, classroom, or hallway. Teach students the seven elements of art and focus on one element each week. Lead directed drawings with students or find experts on YouTube to teach your class how to draw step by step. Do not say, "I am not an artist. I cannot draw." Take a risk. Be vulnerable. Be authentic. Be you.

5. Don't be afraid to get STEAM-y.

The intentional integration of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics allows students to be creative, collaborative, critical thinkers, and communicators, and to find their voice. Using makerspaces, project-based and problem-based learning, and the design thinking process allows students to become innovative, out-of-the-box thinkers. I challenged my 10- and 12-year-old children to make stop-motion videos (even though I had no idea how to make them). They researched it on their own, downloaded an app, and spent hours together making stop-motion videos with voice-overs out of Legos. Provide opportunities for creating hands-on science

experiments and exploring the 5E model of teaching the Next Generation Science Standards in your classroom. You can also facilitate experiments in a virtual environment through live labs in your kitchen or virtual science labs you can find online. Infusing social–emotional learning and the arts into science education can create a holistic STEM education that enhances children's appreciation of and interest in science (Garner et al., 2018).

Concluding Thoughts

Teachers who intentionally integrate the arts into their virtual or physical classroom have noted the joy students find as they discover their voice and have a positive way to express themselves. Bring the arts into your classroom and allow your students to find their voice today! 🍎

References

CAST. (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from http://udlguidelines.cast.org

Garner, P. W., Gabitova, N., Gupta, A., & Wood, T. (2018). Innovations in science education: Infusing social emotional principles into early STEM learning. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 13*(4), 889–903. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-017-9826-0

Sajnani, N., Mayor, C., & Tillberg-Webb, H. (2020). Aesthetic presence: The role of the arts in the education of creative arts therapists in the classroom and online. *The Arts in Psychotherapy, 69.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2020.101668

Resources

Google Slides: slides.google.com

Digital Portfolios with Seesaw: web.seesaw.me

Flipgrid: flipgrid.com

Google Classroom: classroom.google.com

Tinkercad: tinkercad.com

Scratch: scratch.mit.edu

Google CS First Coding: csfirst.withgoogle.com

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