The Eye, Hand, Brain and Heart Connection

How Emphasizing the “Unteachable” Skills Leads to Developing Confidence and Growth in Students with Autism.
ADHD.
Most successful artists develop these traits, yet few tell students how to do so.

- Determination/Grit
- Self-motivation
- Time management
- Attention to detail
- Ability to take risks
- Ability to fail and not give up
- Humbleness
- Self-awareness

- Ability to withstand frustration and confusion
- Ability to recognize and capitalize on strengths
- Ability to recognize and compensate for challenges
- Ability to redefine success
- Ability to recognize and be proud of personal growth
“I am not a teacher and you are not students. You are young professional artists learning your craft and trade.”
“My job is to scramble your brains and yours is to unscramble it.”
“Confusion is good, it means you are learning.”
“If I’ve done my job right, by the end of the semester you will be transformed and won’t need me.”
My Goal: Simulate a professional environment based on master/apprentice model.
1. **Develop a community of trust.**
2. Assume everyone wants to do well but may not know how.
3. Allow joy and laughter in the classroom.
4. Teach students how to take brain-breaks.
5. Eating is good, it activates brain-cells.
6. Discuss my failures and challenges to foster student self-acceptance of their own strengths and challenges.
7. Create self-awareness through self-analysis.
8. **Emphasize process and growth not competition.**
9. Carefully design projects that no one is able to do without guidance and encouragement.
   
   *(No one can rely on raw talent.)*
Identify and debunk the myths society has about creative people.

Help students learn how to identify and capitalize on their strengths. Help students learn ways to compensate for their challenges.
I assign a number of sketches due the next class period. These are designed to force students out of their comfort-zone.
Emphasize process over product.

Teach a creative process that incorporates self-awareness and self-analysis of visual products by:

1. Developing Critical Thinking Skills
2. Developing Hand Skills

Teach about neuroscience and learning.

Teach about the connection between hand-skills and intelligence.

Design projects that are specific yet vague so students have to make meaning for themselves.

Break down each assignment into manageable steps with frequent deadlines and clear goals.
Project One: Ant Tracks

Objective: Visually demonstrate a variety of ways that lines communicate meaning.

Directions:

Go watch real ants.
   Draw their path of movement and interaction with other ants.

Draw the movements and interactions of people by:
   Watching students at the scramble light during class changes and Watching them from above.

Choose one word from each list that describes an individual ant’s personality—a total of three (3) ants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ant Personality #1</th>
<th>Ant Personality #2</th>
<th>Ant Personality #3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Militant</td>
<td>Flaky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jittery</td>
<td>Rigid</td>
<td>Bizarre</td>
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<td>Fidgety</td>
<td>Harsh</td>
<td>Psycho</td>
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<td>Flustered</td>
<td>Inflexible</td>
<td>Silly</td>
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<td>Shaky</td>
<td>Exact</td>
<td>Foolish</td>
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<td>Hysterical</td>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>Goofy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td>Detailed</td>
<td>Irrational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unglued</td>
<td>Meticulous</td>
<td>Crazy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spooked</td>
<td>Strict</td>
<td>Freaky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frantic</td>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td>Harebrained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hyper</td>
<td>Stiff</td>
<td>Idiotic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jumpy</td>
<td>Determined</td>
<td>Nutty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your task is to use line to map each ant’s tracks during the course of one day. Do not draw the ants—only use different types of line: Jagged, broken, dotted, gestural, scribbled, fat, thin, angular, calligraphic, etc. We must be able to identify each ant—by the type of line you use and follow their tracks—throughout the composition. Do not use any imagery.
Learn to analyze the formal qualities of art: Line, Shape, Value, Texture, and Color.

Learn to connect each element of art to emotions.
Define creativity and why it's necessary to take risks and endure failure.

Fill in all 20 circles by drawing objects based on a circle.

Do this in three minutes. One, two, three....Go!
Learn to observe the world around them and use their experience as inspiration.

Documenting student movement at the scramble light.
Learn to interpret the world around them and apply it in their artwork through developing symbolic and abstract thought.
Teach them to analyze and revise their sketches and encourage them to discuss their in-progress work with others in the classroom.
Teach them to analyze both their working process and the final product.

How can I do this better?

1. What were the challenges?

2. What did you learn?

3. Analyze your design: What are the strengths? What would you change?

4. What did you learn about the design process? How will it help in future projects? How will this help you in future work?
Key Strategies that Help Students with Autism

Developing a community of trust.

• First day Icebreaker. Make friends.
• First two weeks of class: partner discussions
• Small group critiques (redefine critiques)
• Redefine success
• Attempt to get to know each student
• Encourage and support each student.
• Discuss my struggles with ADHD and anxiety. Discuss ways I have learned to compensate.
• **Hold them accountable for their growth.**
• Do not allow excuses based on their disability.
• **Encourage them to develop strategies to compensate for their challenges.** *How can you change this? What can you do to help yourself?*

*These methods are used with all students. We hold many honest discussions where students publicly identify their challenges and how they found solutions to help themselves*
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Beginning sketches

Creativity Exercise
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Observation of ants

Observation of ants

Student without Autism
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Self-analysis
A major break-through

Preliminary sketches
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Beginning sketches project one.

Beginning sketches project two. Abstract ideas are becoming more complex.
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Beginning sketches

Progression of visual ideas.
Project two

Selection and refinement.
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Shape analysis.
**Project two**

Progression of visual ideas.
**Project two**

Shapes are more complex.
Visual organization is sophisticated.
From sketchbook of a student with Autism

Project one
Progression of visual ideas.

Project two
Integration of visual preferences.
Personalizing artwork.
Development of abstract thought.
What’s the value of redefining success?
Students take ownership of their growth and their future. They face their “dark night” and make a commitment to themselves.

Successes of students with Autism.

1. Retake the class
2. Find another path to realize their dreams.
3. Be persistent and not give up.
4. Start to take charge and trust in themselves.
“Don’t ever let go of your dreams regardless of what others tell you. **Find a way that works for you!**

**If I can do it, you can too!”**
“Why follow in someone else’s footsteps? The view isn’t very good from behind.”