



Arts Education & Social Justice Framework for Teaching Artists

Arts Corps ignites the creative power of youth, so that all young people have the courage to imagine and freedom to create a just and vibrant future. Creating art can be a personal act of liberation, and when done collectively, we can transform schools, neighborhoods and beyond.

[Arts Corps' Mission, Vision and Values](#)

Purpose of the Arts Education & Social Justice Framework:

- A tool for self reflection on our biases and perspectives
- A framework for reflection when planning lessons and program

Baseline Social Justice Teaching Practices

Talk the Talk

- We understand, and can explain, the Arts Corps' Arts Education & Social Justice Framework (AESJ Framework).

Walk the Walk

- Interrupting Oppression: We incorporate tools and skills for identifying and interrupting oppressive dynamics.
- Ongoing Learning: We are always building our skills and strategies for interrupting oppression and promoting healing.
- Lesson Planning: We include activities that build community, belonging and reflection. We incorporate youth choice and voice. We ensure that learning experiences are culturally relevant, responsive and anti-racist; unit learning objectives include:
 - technical (art-specific) skills
 - social emotional learning
 - and social justice skills.

Ground Ourselves in Purpose (Remember)

- We ignite the creative power of youth *so that all young people have the courage to imagine and freedom to create a just and vibrant future. Creating art can be a personal act of liberation, and when done collectively, we can transform schools, neighborhoods and beyond.*

Why Do We Need an Arts Education & Social Justice Framework?

Arts Corps recognizes the need for art to act as a liberatory process and works to expand the opportunities for both our students and our teaching artists.

The Situation:

- Access to arts education is largely determined by one's race, income and immigration status.
- Youth of color disproportionately do not have the same access to arts education as their white peers.
- Queer youth often face bullying.
- White teaching artists have wider opportunities to teaching positions, relative to teaching artists of color.
- Evidence for these have been found in numerous formal studies and reports as well as experiences of the young people who Arts Corps serves, and our teaching artists.

Arts Corps' Response:

- Prioritize working at sites located in low-income communities of color.
- Prioritize hiring teaching artists who reflect the experiences and identities of the young people we serve.
- Provide a pathway for young artists to build skills and knowledge to become social-justice minded teaching artists.
- Apply a social justice lens in all areas of work: curriculum development, assessment, classroom management, hiring processes, fundraising, and pedagogy.
- Support teaching artists in applying this AESJ Framework in their work with institutions and classrooms.

The narrative below outlines steps that apply broadly and deeply to the act of teaching. It is meant to guide teaching artists to **Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk** and **Ground Ourselves in Purpose**.

Look in the Mirror - Walk in the Door - Connect with Students Build Together - Leave the Room

Look in the Mirror

Teaching artists are grounded in an awareness of self. Before we walk into any teaching situation, we take a good look in the mirror. Why do we make art? Why did we become teaching artists? Even if we've answered these questions in the past, *have we questioned this assumption recently?*

Teaching artists make a commitment to self-reflect critically and consistently, which requires us to lean into discomfort and eventually create new ways of relating to the world vis-a-vis our students. Understanding what drives us to make art makes us better artists; understanding what drives us to teach makes us better teachers.

It is essential that we strive to understand our personal histories and our relationship to power - specifically in regards to age, gender, class, and race. We are able to name and challenge cultural norms we carry with us into the learning environment. What is the complex interplay of oppressive forces that shape our own inner lives? How do we un/intentionally create power dynamics? What youth do we like/relate with the most? Why? Who receives our praise and how often? Who do we give positive reinforcement? Who do we send out of the class or punish?

Because the cycle of growth and change is ongoing, ever-present and inevitable, we must consistently practice self reflection. As we challenge ourselves with these questions, the answers change over time.

Walk in the Door

Door to the Classroom: Upon walking in the door to any classroom, teaching artists analyze and reflect upon the physical nature of a learning space and the students in it. Where is it? What does the space look like? How are seats arranged? Is there student work on the wall? Where are the students sitting? Who is sitting with whom? The dynamics of the space inform the relative distribution of power.

Doors to Institutions: Doors also represent the gates to an institution. Institutions determine who consistently has access, opportunity and power, and who is ignored and penalized. Institutions (ie: education, criminal punishment, housing, healthcare) display similar patterns that are all deeply shaped by legacies of oppression along the lines of race, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability and beyond. Often these institutions overlap, creating a structural web of oppressive policies and practices. *Who holds the keys to these doors? Who are the gatekeepers?*

Art as a Key: Art and creative expression are essential for the birth of ideas, rejuvenation of the human spirit and for individual transformation/testimony. Art also allows communities to step into a place of power to tell stories, envision a new world, and struggle for transformative social change. Art develops creative and imaginative capacity, which offers new ways of thinking. All of these lead to social change -- and social justice. Making art can feel good and joy is an act of resistance.

Connect with Students

Trust: Building trust is essential to making art. Trust is the foundation upon which every human relation is built; human relations are the building block of every learning community. Trust requires a foundation of broad community connection and it requires us to be grounded in honoring the individual experiences of students, setting a container for students to be vulnerable. We maintain trust by acting with consistency, transparency and accountability.

Community: Teaching artists endeavor to understand and connect with the communities in which we teach. The young people we serve do not exist in a vacuum; they are a part of families, communities, and neighborhoods. We seek to learn and understand the context in which these young people live and play. Our relationship to young people and their communities shapes our collective experience.

Build Together

With Students: We strive to honor student voice, perspective and experience. We set expectations, not to shame and penalize, but rather to deepen community, self-actualization and possibility.

With Fellow Teachers: Teaching artists work collaboratively with fellow educators, after-school coordinators and youth workers. We strategize collectively and create space to communicate and reflect.

Communication: Teaching artists invite questions and experimentation.

Addressing Conflict: Teaching artists know that conflicts between students are not isolated or solely personal. We are grounded in the understanding that oppression serves to create, amplify, and sustain conflict on mass scale. Teaching artists approach conflict with a lens of wholeness, critical thinking and a commitment to resisting social inequity. Conflict can be generative. Conflict, when skillfully navigated, can help us connect with one another. Conflict is regarded and practiced differently from culture to culture.

Leave the Room

As You Leave: Teaching artists understand that all classes come to an end. Holding this reality, we craft goals that are both ambitious and achievable. Teaching artists are rooted in a vision of liberation and transformative social change. We measure success by assessing how each of our classes has collectively taken steps toward this vision.

As Students Leave: Students are equipped with creative tools to better understand self, consciously navigate the world, tap into power from within, and build community in your absence.