

WALO by Katrina Axford

It has been four weeks since coming back from HTH and it has been busy!! My grade 12's who have taken up most of my time are nearly finished and I can see light at the end of the tunnel. I'm exhausted and wish there was more time in the day but I am still on a high from High Tech High. I have been reading all my MOC colleagues WALO's and connect with them all. I could talk about two or three WALO experiences but I have chosen my most difficult one. I have an Art class of grade 10's, which have been a challenge since the beginning for all sorts of reasons. I have found it difficult to connect and engage majority of the class and what baffled me the most is the units of work have been successful in previous classes. The worst bit was they had no opinion and were negative when I asked for one. We had a horrible culture going on.

When I came back from HTH I was afraid to do anything challenging with this class but I made my mind up that I was going to do it anyway because quite frankly it couldn't get much worse. The first day back I spoke about High Tech High and what happens there. I talked about POL's and critiques and said they all would be doing them. OMG the look on their faces!! Then I asked my students to get into groups of approximately 4-6 and wrote two questions on the board. What is Art? And why should we create it? They had to discuss it for 15 minutes and write down their answers on a big piece of paper. It started off slow but eventually the conversations were flowing and most (not all) students were engaging in the discussion. After the 15 minutes the students all came back together. I then said now as a group you are going to do a POL standing up in front of the class. The look on faces was again interesting but I said you don't have to speak but you do have to go up with your group to be supportive. I spoke about the protocols, "Be kind, helpful and specific" and creating a culture of respect as an audience member otherwise no one will want to do this. Then something came over the class, everyone stood up with their group and everyone but one member of the class spoke. It was great, the answers weren't that deep but at least it was a start.

It has been four weeks since then and things have started to improve a lot. The students have finished their "Suburban Safari" unit, a digital art piece created in Photoshop where I really pushed their quality of making and refining the final product (I have attached the task sheet and examples down below). We did our first critique session and gallery walk three days ago and it was excellent. I filmed it all because I couldn't believe the change with engagement, the insightful comments and discussion. I laid an A3 colour print out of everyone's final piece around the tables. Students then had to walk around and comment on post it notes a minimum of three warm comments (I run out of post its) and then three cool. They really were great and what I didn't expect was the disappointment from the students that had not completed the work because they were being critiqued too. It showed me the culture was changing and now there is an expectation that their final products will be on show and critiqued finished or not. Finally the culture of this class is changing and it is very exciting.

This WALO has impacted my practise because now I do critique lessons with all my classes and I call them that. I have always critiqued but haven't really labelled those lessons or used consistent language, now I do. I also will do POL's at the end of every unit because I have already noticed students want to produce their best product so they can get a good critique. Its already evident they care more what their peers think than what grade they get from me at the end. My WALO has informed my thinking in relation to creating a better culture in my classroom, which will result in better artwork being made and therefore successful outcomes and grades. It will also hopefully spread into other

subjects because the students will take these authentic learning experiences with them. This WALO experience has influenced my LSP thinking by being more fearless and ambitious. I want to be creating a unit of work that I would have never considered doing only months ago. I'm still waiting to find out what I will be teaching next year and who I will be working with but as soon as that happens I will know what direction to go in.

The recurring questions that I keep thinking about and coming back to are ones that I have spoken about with my HTH LSP MOC colleagues and they are how can I keep this culture going if the other teachers don't? Will the students come to resent my class if they are challenged about their learning all the time? If I push them too much will they pick subjects that are "easier" and maybe less confronting?

EXAMPLES OF STUDENT DIGITAL ART PIECES

