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ABSTRACT
        Classroom teachers have stereotypes and myths about
art education that seem to arise for various reasons including a
range of backgrounds, interests, and lack of art experiences;
diversity and contradiction of preferences; expectations for an easy
course and high grades; and preconceptions about art and art
teaching. This latter category includes confusion between creative
versus conceptual learning, hard work versus completing the task
assigned, art learning as rule-drive versus rule-divergent, and
compulsive versus disciplined behavior. A participant observation
study was set up to address these problems, suggest solutions, and
explore a major metaphor of art education as creative tension.
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Creative Tension:

Problems in Teaching Art Education to Classroom Teachers.

Mary Stokrocki

Problems in Teaching Art Education to Classroom Teachers: Creative Tension

After teaching art to classroom teachers for 12 years, I am still overwhelmed with their persistent stereotypes and myths about art education. Their misconceptions have become problematic and seem to stem from their 1) range of backgrounds, interests, and lack of art experiences; 2)diversity and contradiction of preferences; 3) expectations for an easy course and high grades; and 4)preconceptions about art and art teaching. This latter category includes confusion between creative versus conceptual learning, hard work versus completing the task assigned, art learning as rule-drive versus rule-divergent, and compulsive versus undisciplined behavior. Finally, even poor teaching conditions at the university level encourages student irritation at the college level.

The purpose of this paper is 1) to explore these problems, 2) suggest solutions, and 3) to present a major metaphor of art education of this group as creative tension. At the base of these tensions is the concept of art itself as the creative overcoming of obstacles, which shall be discussed later.

Method

Participant observation methods dominate my research and teaching as well. Participant observation consists of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I gather data through pre/post questionnaires, pre/post drawings, letters of complaint, informal interviews, and class discussions. I usually give a pre-questionnaire on the first day of my class (See Table 1). The questionnaire helps determine their background and preconceptions of art and art teaching. These questionnaires are an integral part of my curriculum and they form the basis of class discussion.

Participants

One class of 20 students electing the course "Art in the Elementary School" was chosen as a sample. Sixteen of the students were female and four were male. Most of the students were in their twenties and three were older. Seventy percent of the students work part time. They informed me that they have little time to do homework, especially in an elective course.

Findings

A range of students' backgrounds, interests, and art experiences: The range of students' backgrounds and their interests were varied: Out of 20 students, 45% selected the course to help them in teaching, 10% chose it for their work in child care. 10% were recommended the course by their councelor, but 15% heard it was interesting (students in aviation management, justice studies, and music).

Their experiences with art were equally diverse. Five students had no art experiences whatsoever, 20% had some high school art, 20% were art

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majors, and 10% had other college art courses. Usually required of classroom teachers, the course at this time was open to any college student as a university elective.

A diversity and contradiction of preferences: When students were asked on a questionnaire, what were their favorite art experiences, their art preferences were diverse. Twenty percent of the students preferred drawing and two students specifically mentioned working with pastels. One art student was a ceramics major and another worked in fibers. Two students mentioned that visiting museums was inspiring. In regards to least preferred art experiences, 15% of the students answered drawing. One student found still life drawing was boring, another mentioned that accuracy was hard to achieve, a third student had difficulty controlling watercolor, and two students thought that museums were dull.

Student expectations of an easy course and high grades: My course outline stated that the course would challenge student myths on art and education, develop their personal artistic growth, and introduce them to child art. On the first day of class, two boys giggled, as I introduced the course scope, sequence, and expectations. When I questioned them about their reactions, they answered that they were in the wrong class. The next day, I was told that in the past the course was regarded as an easy "A" by students. Later in the course, one student dropped the class because she was taking too many credits. Another girl missed too many classes due to an outside job and nearly failed. One final student informed me that she was spending hours on her art projects at home because she was not able to complete the project in class. Students were amazed that this course was more rigorous than expected.

One situation in particular caused conflict due to student stubbornness. I first noticed that this student, a senior, was the first to finish her assignments with minimal effort. To coax her to elaborate on her ideas was difficult. She "whined" in class that she needed to get an "A" and wanted to do extra credit work. She was already achieving a "B" grade because of test grades. I insisted that she needed to spend more time on her class projects and that extra credit assignments for her were not fair to other students. She even argued with me over the meaning of the concept "three-dimensional," which we just reviewed the day before. Experience has taught me that when students fail to listen to reason after repeated attempts, to not argue with them. Not all students will regard art seriously and they should be encouraged to drop the course. Professors in the school of education have also recommended early conferences with such students with a third person as arbiter to eliminate charges of personality conflicts.

When asked on a questionnaire what grade they expected, most students (90%) indicated "A" grades. On my course outline, I explained that an "A" grade demanded excellent work or "going beyond" the assignment.

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This practice stems for the work of Bruner (1965) in his book Beyond the Information Given. Most students will accept the challenge; others fight it. Elementary teachers seem to be grade-drive. Experience has taught me that those projects that are weighted more are taken more seriously.

  Stereotypes about art and art education: Overcoming stereotypic ideas and icons in art continues to be the hardest part of my teaching. Examples of stereotypes are the rote repetition of popular images, forms of speech (cliches), and attitudes (art is fun). Stereotypes become noticeable when challenged by new ideas and situations. Chapman (1978) covers these obstacles to full response as barriers to learning, especially in adults.

  When covering Lowenfeld and Brittain's (1975) developmental stages in art, I tried to convince students that overcoming stereotypes was a natural part of their own development as well. Chapman's (1978) interest checklist was used. On their questionnaires, I even added the category "I prefer to learn different points-of-view" for them to choose. Adult students really do not know how to change a stereotype, so I set out to help them.

  One of my beginning lessons is to draw a personal cartoon character from different viewpoints in developing a visual narrative (Wilson & Wilson, 1982) about their own development as a teacher. In other words, I am asking them to search their past in order to draw-out the formative influences which pushed them into becoming teachers. In at least one frame, they must depict themselves doing an early art project or engaged in their favorite art form. They record personal cultural histories to cohere their identities as artists and teachers and to establish shared communities of memory" (Zurmuehlen, 1991, p.10). I usually give students lessons on exaggerating face expression and body types. I ask them to personalize their character by making it look like themselves in hairdo, coloring, and favorite dress/props. They are also asked to use three unusual views, such as closeup, bird's-eye, and worm's eye. I suggest that they use one of their name initials for a nose/eyebrows, that they could dress their character in their favorite sport outfit, or pose them in favorite actions. In spite of constant reminders that it is my job to help them to go beyond the stereotypic, they continue to persist in using them in subsequent assignments. Even when I announce that I will not accept such examples as smiley faces and "cutesy" bears, students sometimes regress to stereotypic forms. I have to reinforce these directions many times in different ways. If this sounds similar to teaching adolescents, the behavior is indeed related since so many teachers have had little or no art training.

  Conceptual and creative learning: Classroom teachers tend to perceive art as creativity (30%) and free expression (50%) as indicated on their pre-questionnaires. The emphasis is usually on the term "free," to them meaning doing anything you want. When asked the question "What is

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a good art," their main answer was personal preference (35%). As one student commented, "Art is anything you've created that makes you feel good." Another student wrote, "Art is anything you can get away with." In contrast, the concept of freedom as risk-taking needs to be discussed. Freedom is a task of choice and responsible decision-making (Maitland, 1980). Americans seem to be hedonists at heart and avoid all obstacles as risks; however, the creative person tries to overcome them. Responsible decision-making at its root "response" demands an informed choice based on art criteria.

Therefore, I try to persuade students that art learning entails the learning of art concepts, and their artwork should exhibit the assigned concepts. Concepts or criteria need to be clearly displayed, discussed, and reinforced for students to remember them. I find myself inventing jingles to help them retain information. For example in studying color harmony and introducing color accents, I usually remind students that "a little daub will do you." This same slogan fits nicely as the glue rule. [The old Brill cream commercial is probably antiquated, but I am open for new suggestions.]

Hard work versus completing the task assigned: Some students feel that if they have worked very hard on a project that their work is successful. On one occasion, a student cried because I asked her to add detail to the back of her mobile. She had forgotten that a mobile must look good from all sides or "in-the-round." I praised her for her technical achievement, but noted that her sculpture still needed something beyond white cardboard. We just reviewed and explored the idea of "in-the-round"earlier in clay relief. Such puritanical ideas about work prevents students from understanding the concept taught. I now introduce a lesson as in a series. The first attempt is the test [print]; the next attempts are experiments. This is followed by in-process appraisal of their on-going work individually and sometimes as a group. The last stage consists of reworking earlier attempts. In this way, students learn that art-making is a series of decisions and revisions and indeed hard work. Ironically, some students are not used to "working hard" on art. Inexperienced students in art feel that they did it once and that don't have to redo or add to it. Art is not regarded as serious work. Such students must learn that work means not one attempt, but many. At the basis of this misunderstanding is the "project approach," which Dewey (1934) condoned. Dewey called the art experience, a process of doing and undergoing." In other words, he referred to the constant process of perception and revision of an art form while working on it.

Art learning as rule-driven and rule divergent: Classroom teachers fail to understand that learning art in the beginning demands learning the rules, and later breaking them. This ambiguous nature of art

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learning is frustrating to them. Students demand clarity--to know exactly what an assignment entails. Later, they have difficulty understanding that they have not met the requirement to add diversity to their work. The concept to be divergent, add variety, to be original, and to add some mystery is ambiguous to them. They need to be shown how to do this. A typical exercise is for them to make composite or hybrid animals. I no longer grade studio projects, but give more tests and special assignments. Students are given a choice to do an assignment over once, if their grade is lower than a "C." Some classroom teachers have difficulty with divergent thinking.

Compulsive versus frivolous behaviors: Classroom teachers as students seemed to become more dependent as learners and compulsive about grades. The School of Education conditions their behavior and attitudes. If they don't get an "A" in an art course, many will contest the grade. They crave exact procedures and how to achieve good results quickly. Such mechanical learners need to have deadlines and art experiences that free them of details (Michael, 1983, p.111). Experientially, some of these students are evolving from the schematic stage and struggling with the stage of dawning realism. Others are more frivolous (intuitive and emotional) and give minimal attention to their work. "Their work is centrally placed, a vag ely defined whole" (Michael, 1983, p. 125). These students need to develop greater skill and to be coaxed into using more details. Many of our classroom teachers are still adolescents at heart.

Poor conditions for art learning: The physical conditions of a setting can inhibit learning in any situation. At one time, I had a beautiful art room in the School of Education, until computers moved in and took over. For nine years, I taught art education in a basement that was too hot and where I had to compete with a noisy exhaust fan and humming florescent overhead lights. The room was often crowded with too many students, many of which my Chairman would allow to take the course at the last minute. Such conditions made it difficult to teach and for students to learn because the situation was uncomfortable and students became irritable. Finally, I gave up my beloved art room, even after a new $2,000 exhaust fan was installed, which didn't seem to solve the problem. I also believe that the weather conditions--seasonal snow, cold, and general grayness, also made students grumpy. The instructor seemed to be the focus of every complaint in the university. On teaching evaluations, students complained of such things as lack of room, university demands, too much work. Chapman (1978) states, "The physical and psychological setting in which we view art can determine which properties of a form will be available to our perception."

Post-Questionnaires as a Way of Reviewing Teaching: At the end of a class, I ask students various questions on the course content, their

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attitudes, and conceptions of art and education. The major open-ended question that I ask is what have they learned new. The majority of elementary teachers (75%) answer how to change their stereotpic images. Others tell me about their changed attitudes about art: to be more patient (66%), the hard work involved (50%), their knowledge of different drawing viewpoints (25%) and multicultural education (33%), their appreciation of the various activities in class (33%), and the chance to redo their work (25%). In response to what was the most successful art activity, they mostly responded the museum tour (75%), making a visual narrative (66%), claywork (50%), and working together as teams (25%).

Students still complain about the lack of clarity in the course, which is unavoidable, in spite of the many handouts that I distribute. Some semesters are better than others. Instructors of such courses can try their best, work hard, be organized and extremely informed, and still not please students--its the nature of the discipline and times.

Conclusion: Art Education as Creative Tension

Over the years, I have discovered that teaching art education at this level is one of overcoming myths about art and education and conflicts of all kinds. This involves creative tension 1) between students and the unknown media, 2) between teacher and student expectations, and 3) between professional/university demands and professor survival. At the base of these more obvious conflicts is the nature of art itself as creative tension. Maitland (1980) describes art as the creative transformation of tension. He states:

> Since discipline and obstacles are the necessary conditions of creative
> performance, through will we can engage in the discipline of art and
> try to find, arrange, or correct circumstances in the hope of
> encouraging inspiration. In the end, however, one must wait in
> silence for the transforming power of creative freedom (p.292)

In my teaching, I have accepted creative tension as part of the course. Usually hidden, this phenomenon needs to be discussed more in teacher training because it is part of life, learning, and the creative process. I now cover the dominant myths about art and art education in class, discuss with students their negative attitudes, and explore these misconceptions in written as well as studio projects.

The name and focus of the course also has been recently changed to "Studio Art and Human Development." This political maneuver has eliminated the teaching methodology and suppositively left the substance of the discipline. Another course on the teaching of art appreciation and human development has also been designed and is taught by another professor. In spite of the studio nature of the course, I still find that discussing aesthetics and the concept of creative tension as important. Now, of course, I can lead students into their own development more, because

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the adult stage of development in one of artistic dissonance (Eisner, 1976). This stage is fraught with artistic dissonance, but I can discuss their own developmental problems, theories, and issues. We have even began to discuss multicultural theories of development (Gardner, 1989) and of art (Anderson, 1990). In fact, the dialogue between .ny students and myself has opened beyond class, as I pull students into my office for extra consultation. This requires more work and time on my part. What seemed to be the easiest art education course to teach at the university at one time has become the most difficult and time-consuming. The concept of creative tension as a metaphor for art education is in its formative state and needs to be further explored.

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