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Dancing with Line: Inquiry, Democracy, and Aesthetic Development as an Approach to Art Education

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines an art lesson in a multiage inquiry-based charter school. The arts curriculum focused on democratic process, dialogical interaction, aesthetic and imaginative understanding, and visual culture art education. Questions considered in the research were: Within an inquiry-based setting what might an art lesson look like? How does creating a dialogical/democratic art classroom support inquiry-based learning? How does an inquiry-based art classroom support and extend creativity and imagination? How might an inquiry-based elementary art curriculum incorporate visual culture? The inquiry process gave students the latitude to practice individual creativity. Imaginative processes were engaged as students planned their own lesson, created their own problems, and expressed their answers through a performance.

Introduction

She skipped and hopped; she danced gracefully to the music. Her lithe young body moved in a sinuous fashion while she replicated various kinds of line as she danced. Her five or six plaited pigtails tied with small, colored plastic balls flew in the air only to glance her cheeks as her feet hit the floor. She jumped up and down and side-to-side seemingly caught in midair only to fall again to the beat of the music and the gravity that held her on earth. Her long, thin, line-like arms were covered by a long-sleeve blue tee shirt and she smiled widely as she closed her eyes to the sound of the music. Her arms moved at will, shifting up or down in tandem with her pigtails. The various red, blue and green lines that were projected on her body and all around her were also dancing. The lines were moving in a pattern and quality that were tantamount with the dancer.

What was happening in the room, in the student's experience, was something different from what she had done in her previous school last year. With this new school, she found that her movement and her expression were as important as her words or answers to the test. For the researcher, what seemed to be happening was a powerful intersection of the aesthetic and the intellectual, of movement and stagnant thought, of feelings and thoughts. If indeed this experience was as powerful for the student and the teacher as it appeared to be, what beliefs about teaching and learning were being challenged? How might one document and thus come to understand what was happening? This study represents a researcher's effort to know what was happening, how it was affecting teaching and learning, and how both teacher and learner were changed by the experience.

Background

With the support of an internal grant from a local university, the researcher observed a multiage art classroom in an elementary charter school. The school opened its doors in August of 2006 and had 91 students in grades k-5. Because there was no funding for a visual arts teacher at this new charter school, the administration was pleased to open its doors to a local university thereby creating a visual arts program. Specifically, the grant money allowed the researcher to hire two graduate students and purchase art supplies for the entire school for one academic year.

The students enrolled were selected by lottery after choosing to apply to the school. It was located in a historically African American neighborhood in a school district in central South Carolina. The charter school was founded on inquiry-based learning with the incorporation of multiage classrooms. Inquiry-based schooling for this charter school was characterized by project-centered instruction, student-generated activities coupled with shared projects, public

demonstrations of work, and active engagement and movement. All of these characteristics were set out to oppose traditional “seat time” schooling, teacher-generated problem sets and projects, and individualism that may often be found in traditional public school settings.

There were five classrooms at the charter school consisting of two kindergarten-first grade classrooms, two second and third grade classrooms, and one fourth and fifth grade classroom. Each of the five classes had 18 students or less. The students were taught visual art one time per week for 50 minutes. Situated in an inquiry-based school, this study examines second and third grade arts instruction rooted in democratic, aesthetic theory and the possible applications such a context might have for authentic arts learning.

Purpose of the Study/Statement of the Problem/Research Questions

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) has long been used as a curriculum framework for k-12 arts education (Dobbs, 1998). In fact, DBAE is the generally accepted curriculum framework to which many state standards are aligned. Within the context of DBAE, four components are provided to support an arts curriculum. They are art production, art history, aesthetics, and art criticism. Recently, however, researchers have revisited the basic assumptions of DBAE as an approach for teaching the arts. Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) suggest that DBAE, although still relevant, should also include teaching visual culture, new technology, and personal creativity within a social context. Anderson & Milbrandt labeled this enlarged arts instruction Visual Culture Arts Education (VCAE). Thus, instead of VCAE serving as a replacement for the more deeply rooted tradition of DBAE, recent research suggests that VCAE is an expansion, or add-on to the important basis DBAE offers. In some ways, the emergence of VCAE is a function of and reflection on the new technologies and the subsequent visual cultures in which students and teachers find themselves. In a rather unexpected way, this research also found an intersection between VCAE as a socio-cultural context of learning and constructivist philosophy as students made meaning immersed in new technologies. As such, VCAE offers learners an additional “lens” in which to frame these new problems and the democratic classroom provided a means to understand the problems. Just as students are constructing new meaning within the context of these new ideas, new cultures, and new technologies, teachers are likewise invited to construct and revisit standards, methods of teaching, and curriculum development.

In order to conduct this study, the researcher selected two graduate students with undergraduate degrees in studio areas. Along with their studio degrees, Monica and Chris were both nearing completion of their graduate studies in art education. Monica previously earned an MFA in photography in addition to her undergraduate degree and was seeking a MAT in art education. Chris was also working on a MAT in art education. Neither graduate student had taught in a k-12 art classroom, had taught in a general classroom, nor had they any

experience with inquiry or multiage learning. Monica and Chris were selected for this study primarily, however, based on their expressed interest in this project and because they were eager to put their own research into practice in a multiage, inquiry-based setting. The graduate students were asked to create a mode of instruction and a curriculum framework of their own choosing. Through the discussions shared by the researcher and graduate students, a consensus emerged whereby the graduate students embraced a dialogical/democratic classroom as well suited to an inquiry-based school philosophy. Given that the essential aspects of the dialogical/democratic classroom included ideas of shared decision-making, shared responsibilities, student-centered learning, and relevant real-life problems as curriculum, the alignment of practice and philosophy made good sense to Chris and Monica. As such, the graduate students were free to construct lessons under the assumptions noted above but were to design art lessons that were fundamentally undergirded by the following research questions:

1. Within an inquiry-based setting what might an art lesson look like?
2. How does creating a dialogical/democratic art classroom support inquiry-based learning?
3. How does can an inquiry-based art classroom support and extend creativity and imagination?
4. How might an inquiry-based elementary art curriculum incorporate visual culture?

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study where a professor from a local university and two graduate students collected data using an arts-based approach from a new charter school. Through connoisseurship (Eisner, 1997), the researcher used educational criticism as a methodology. Connoisseurship, as defined by Eisner, is the ability to make fine-grained distinctions, even among complex qualities. Educational criticism is a means of disclosing the fine-grained qualities so that others who do not have the same abilities may understand what is meant. The connoisseur does this through educational criticism and depends on description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics to justify the work. Eisner describes three ways that educational criticism addresses the question of reliability: 1) structural corroboration—triangulation and support from other types of data; 2) consensual validation—agreement among competent others, and 3) referential adequacy—the extent to which educational criticism reveals what might be overlooked. Data were collected by means of video, still photography, audio recordings, transcriptions, and researcher journal writings.

Framing the Lesson

This study centers on the development of one inquiry-based art lesson developed by two graduate students and taught in two multiage classes. The high degree of success for this lesson owes itself to several educational theories. The authors will address each of the educational theories in turn and suggest findings and implications for teaching at the end of this article. Specifically, the discussion will center on inquiry-based learning, the visual cycle of inquiry, the dialogical classroom, aesthetic and imaginative approaches to teaching, and visual culture.

This lesson was highly successful in that the authors felt that it was a clear example of what a multiage, inquiry-based art classroom might look like. As new teachers, Monica and Chris finished their first art lesson with the second and third graders and felt somewhat disappointed with the learning outcomes. It is not that the students did not learn, rather, their paintings, as Chris put it, “did not fill the local airwaves with astonishment from the teachers, parents or the students themselves” (transcription from video, 2006). For the next lesson, Monica and Chris decided to loosen up a bit and present something that was teacher facilitated and fully led by students. They decided to move away from their typical routine, and, according to Monica, “stir up some inquiries” (video transcription, 2006). What started out as a mere exercise, surprisingly progressed into a whole unit of study directed by students.

“What if we helped facilitate a lesson that built up to something big; something fun that would get the students really excited?” (Journal notes, October 2006) Chris asked the researcher.

“Go for it,” the researcher replied. They decided that the students might enjoy acting out a performance of some sort, perhaps something highly kinesthetic.

On the first day of this new lesson, they began with an exercise where students imagined that a famous Kandinsky painting was stolen from a museum and they had to describe the painting to the police so it could be tracked down (Barrett, 1997). The teachers supplied four Kandinsky reproductions, all of which were very similar in color, composition, and subject. Student volunteers pretended that they were the museum curators and stood at the head of the class to describe each of the paintings to their classmates who acted like detectives. The attentive class then had to decide which painting matched the description they just heard. The exercise excited the students and also gave them a chance to practice their newly acquired art vocabulary. They were also able to examine closely the abstract work of Kandinsky. At the next class, they talked with the students more in depth about Kandinsky’s work. They discussed how the artist felt that art could be like music where colors and line could elicit emotions and sensations just like music. Since Kandinsky was particularly drawn to music for

inspiration, the students listened to the work of Wagner while they looked at Kandinsky's paintings. A discussion followed that compared the paintings to the music; special attention was paid to the colors Kandinsky chose, the line quality, and any emotions the students felt while listening to the music and looking at the paintings.

By this time, the students were eager to move about and get out of their chairs, as they wanted to get up and move to the music. So the lesson moved to something highly interactive and action-packed to something unexpected by the teachers. And, a description about the structure of the classroom may add to this discussion of observers and participants.

The art classroom has an interesting design where one side of the room is a glass wall that looks into the media center. Although it is glass, it is virtually sound proof. People on either side of the wall cannot hear what is being said at normal levels. Taking advantage of the glass wall and soundproof rooms, Monica and Chris divided the students into two groups and each teacher took a group into either the media center or the art classroom. With each group, the teachers took a CD player and a CD. The teachers had burned identical CDs that had just five musical works on them. The works were largely non-objective – there were no words or expressed meanings. One song was largely a techno hip-hop, one was drumming, another was an Australian didgeridoo, the fourth was a German pop group, and the last was the Wagner work that Kandinsky listened to frequently.

Each group on each side of the sound proof glass, took turns dancing to a song that the teacher selected. At the same time, the group not dancing stood on the other side of the soundproof glass and listened to parts of each song on their CD to try to guess to which song the other group was dancing.

The children were eager to participate and seemed to enjoy the activity. The teacher would play a bit of each song and ask the guessing group "Is this what they are dancing to?" The guessing children would shout, "Yes!" or "No!" for each song the teacher played. They loved doing the dancing and they enjoyed being the guessers. They seemed quite skilled in the challenge! They would guess the correct answer quickly by showing their fingers one through five.

After each group had two chances to dance and guess, the teachers played the game again but instead of dancing, the students drew to the non-objective music. The teachers provided a large hand-held dry erase board and markers for each student. As with the dancing, the students had to draw to the music. They were not allowed to make symbols, write words, or create recognizable images. They could only use the elements of art to express the music. At first the drawers had a tough time. They seemed never to have thought about art as non-

objective or abstract. And they had a difficult time executing a drawing that only described feelings.

After executing their abstract drawings of zigzags, flowing scribbles, lopsided ellipses, and jaggedly geometric shapes, the students held the boards over their heads for the other group to assess and make their guess. Although the teachers tried to get the students to draw rather than dance, they were highly unsuccessful. Children just could not help themselves. Many had to dance and draw at the same time. The alternate game was just as successful. The students were able to guess which drawing went with the accompanied music. The students were completely engrossed and begged to make more art.

At the next class meeting, the teachers reviewed previous lessons with the students. They engaged the children in the review by discussing how line can have different qualities that can convey mood or emotion. A line can be sad, happy, excited, agitated, angry, perky, and bored. The students easily accepted that music also has that same emotive quality. The teachers told the students that they would choose the music that would inspire the non-objective art that they were about to make. After using democratic means (e.g., discussions, compromise, voting, negotiating) to choose the music to which they would draw, the group decided upon a hip-hop inspired techno composition by consensus.

The children drew to the music that they chose. While the music played, the students passed out white paper and black markers and began drawing. They decided to make free form black marker line drawings. In order to make use of the whole picture plane, the teachers suggested spreading paper clips across the paper. They suggested that the students think about the placement and address each area where the paper clip was laying, in turn. The students listened closely to the music while carrying the line across their picture plane. After completing several drawings, the students chose their favorite and began inserting color into their composition using colored pencils. The students were encouraged to think carefully about how the song made them feel and how certain colors can carry similar emotional connotations. The students were challenged to layer and blend the colors in order to create rich hues and forms. The class closed as the students discussed the results.

But the dancing did not end there. The students wanted to continue to dance, make art, and listen to music. One student suggested that they do the dancing game for the whole school. As luck would have it, every Friday afternoon, one class from the school was invited to share what they have been learning with the whole school. This sharing time was the perfect way to show the school what was happening in art. The teachers wanted the students to come up with some ideas about how they could make everything go smoothly and ensure everybody was involved and had a role to play. The teachers wanted the students to be involved, to make their

own decisions, and to execute the performance. Many class days were spent discussing what would happen. With a firm date for the performance on the calendar, the researcher became increasingly worried about spending so much time in class discussion and arriving at decisions, and so little time practicing the performance. But Monica and Chris were determined to allow the students to make their own decisions about their performance and do it democratically. Votes were counted, children were allowed to stand in front of the class and voice their opinions, and every child was heard.

The Performance: Displaying what they knew

Sizer (1984) asserts that performances, or demonstrations, may be the highest form of assessing student learning. This in mind, the students and teachers were intimately engaged in deciding how they might show what they had learned. The performance before the school, although intimidating for teachers and students, seemed to be the appropriate venue for assessing this learning.

The basic idea of the performance was to have the students present a visually based performance that coincided with the music they had chosen. While the music played, a slideshow of their non-objective drawings would be projected on a large screen on the stage. To the left and right of that screen, four overhead projectors were set up so that students made real-time drawings that were rear-projected onto large, taped together, white sheets of butcher paper. Three children were assigned to an overhead projector with all colors of markers. As the children drew, their line drawings were rear-projected onto the white butcher paper. Some students also danced in front of the projectors so their silhouettes would project onto the newsprint. Lastly, two large sheets of newsprint were hung on the front of the stage for two more students to draw to the music and for the audience to witness it. There was a lot going on and although this was going to be a risk, the teachers remained committed to the notion that these students were up to the challenge.

The students made many great suggestions and addressed many management issues such as taking turns and equitable distribution of responsibilities. After a quick and chaotic orientation to the overhead equipment and performance space, they were ready for the scheduled performance the next day.

The teachers called the first class to come backstage and they rushed from their seats shrieking. After a quick pep talk and reminder about remaining silent during the performance, it was all business. Everything went as the students had planned. Overhead projectors were illuminated on cue. Dancing was expressive and silent. Those students who were drawing were completely engrossed in their role, and there was even some impromptu but smooth swapping of jobs.

During the next class, the teachers congratulated the art students on a job well done and as a group, they reflected on the performance and the entire process leading up to that day. Some students even pointed out how to make the performance better the next time they did it, throwing in ideas that were really quite exciting. Toward understanding the power of performance and the possible academic impact such an experience might have on students, the researcher and teachers considered four theories that seemed to shed light on these inquiry-based, democratic, aesthetic, and reflective experiences.

Findings

This qualitative study set out to answer four questions:

1. Within an inquiry-based setting what might an art lesson look like?
2. How does creating a dialogical/democratic art classroom support inquiry-based learning?
3. How does an inquiry-based art classroom support and extend creativity and imagination?
4. How might an inquiry-based elementary art curriculum incorporate visual culture?

The section to follow will address each of these research questions with some discussion and positioning of related theory. Moving images from this study may be viewed at http://web.me.com/palmettoeducation/Site_2/Introduction.html

Inquiry-Based Learning in the Art Classroom

Research Question #1: Within an inquiry-based setting what might an art lesson look like?

Largely attributed to the work of Dewey (1956), inquiry-based learning was largely initiated in the science classroom. Using the same methods of teaching and learning in the sciences, many other disciplines have grasped the idea of using problem-solving skills in the classroom. Inquiry, as defined by Chiappetta & Adams (2004), seeks truth, information, and knowledge by using a process involving asking questions and solving problems. Even children, while still infants, learn to make sense of their world by inquiring. Babies use their senses to taste, touch, hear and see. From the beginning of life, it is natural for human beings to learn to apply the human senses to formulate questions (Chiappetta & Adams, 2004).

In our study, inquiry-based education focused on the growth of the students, which enabled the students to guide the curriculum and engage in self-directed learning. The teachers, who led from behind, allowed the students to take responsibility for their learning. Had the art teachers written a lesson plan and tried to fulfill the specific objectives, the students might not

have had the same experience. This reality may be why inquiry-based instruction does not fit into the traditional scope and sequence methods of learning. Traditional sequences of learning tend to move in a linear fashion while inquiry is in a cyclical pattern. Another important difference is that inquiry invites divergent rather than convergent thought. Not all questions have one right answer. Sometimes, multiple solutions can be found for a question. Consequently, inquiry-based lesson plans can be written as students direct the natural convergence and flow of their learning.

The inquiry cycle, as defined by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (The Inquiry Page), is ask, investigate, create, discuss, and reflect (see figure 1 below).

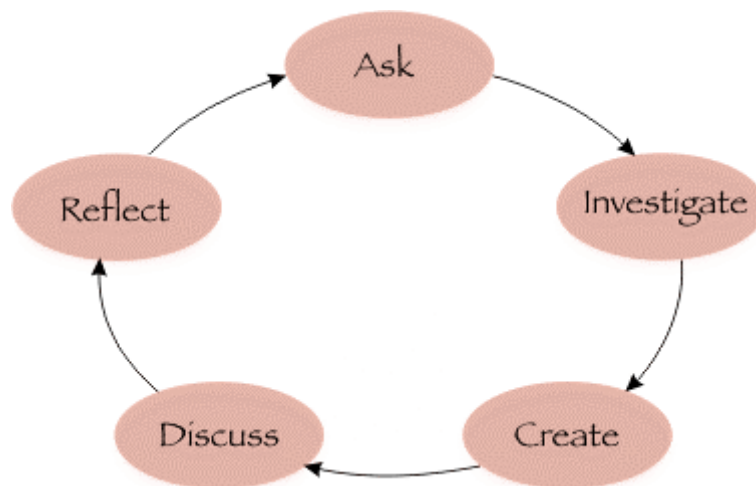


Figure 1. *The inquiry cycle.*

From the University of Illinois Inquiry Page - <http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu>

The first step of the cycle is to *ask*, or pose a question. Questions are derived from the senses. This step will address the issue or problem that needs to be solved. In the second step, *investigate* asks the students to research the issue. Once a thorough investigation has been accomplished, the students will begin the *create* step of the cycle. Here, the students will produce something such as a performance, writing, or artwork. In the fourth step, *discuss*, students are encouraged to share their creations through dialogue or writing. Finally, in *reflect*, the students evaluate the effectiveness of the creation and pose new questions, which effectively starts a new cycle of inquiry.

As one can see with this lesson, collaborative inquiries are essential to move the class through projects. Eisner (2004) writes that “we develop, in part, by responding to contributions to

others, and in turn we provide others with material to which they respond” (p. 7). He purports that communication in a classroom provides the opportunity for the growth of culture (Eisner, 2004). Although the science and general classrooms have long established and have well-researched inquiry approaches to learning, the art classroom has not experienced this kind of investigation. However, according to Siegesmund (2000), artists have often engaged in this kind of inquiry while making art.

Within the general cycle of inquiry, a personal artistic cycle may occur. Siegesmund (2000) describes this process as the visual cycle of inquiry. Unlike the general cycle of inquiry, this visual cycle of inquiry may be non-linguistic as well as linguistic. The visual inquiry cycle consists of perception, conception, expression, reflection, and re-vision (Siegesmund, 2004; 2000) (see figure 2 below).

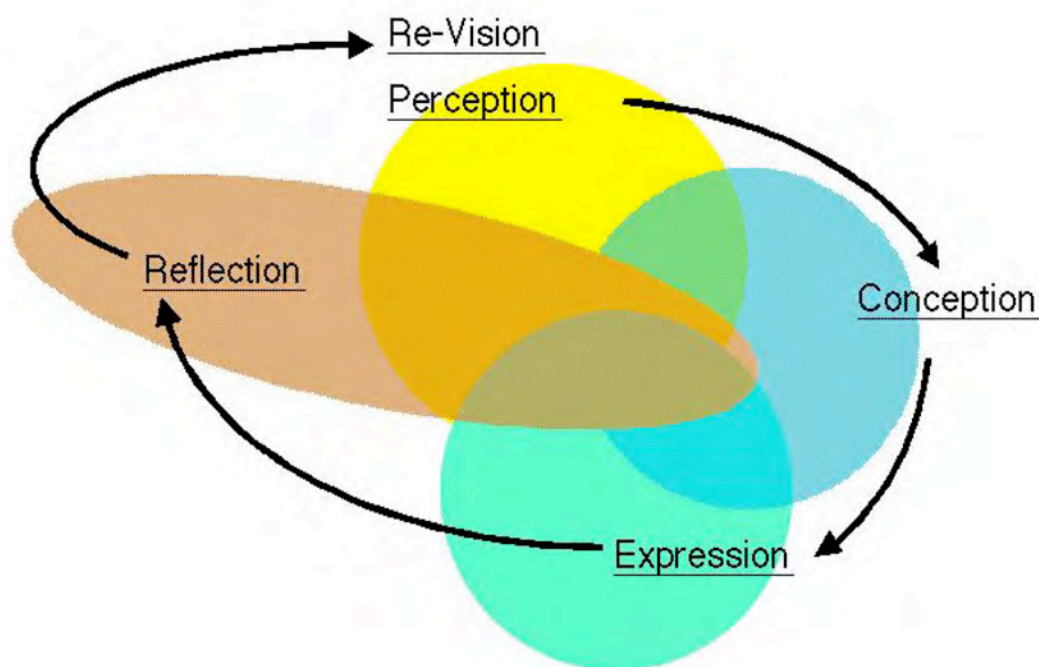


Figure 2. *Siegesmund's (2000) Visual Cycle of Inquiry.*

As the students in the study worked to solve their problems, they engaged in a sequence of thinking and learning. This visual cycle of inquiry moved the lesson in a clockwise direction from perception to conception, to expression, to reflection and finally to revision. As students grappled with a problem to be solved, they were at first moved by their perceptions and feelings through what they may have heard, seen, touched, tasted, or smelled. The students knew that they were attracted to the idea of dancing and music. They were especially intrigued

with the idea that they wanted to perform for the whole school. Attending to their senses invoked a feeling or emotion (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 2004; Heid, 2005). The students then moved fully into the first stage of the cycle of visual inquiry – *perception*. This process used the senses to acquire information and can be completely non-linguistic. From this information, the students began asking their own questions. How can we do a performance? What will it look like? How can we accomplish it? When will it be? These were just a few of the many questions that arose. The students essentially created their own problem to be solved and set about finding a solution.

It was at this point the students moved on to the next stage. They formulated a *concept* for their ideas about how to do a performance. Conception was the process of moving from things that are felt to arriving at an abstract idea. It was the moment in which the idea began to take shape. In our study, the conceptions were planned, shared, tried, and drawn through conversation with peers rather than in private and through non-linguistic means. This process took many minutes of talking, working through details and arriving at decisions. They knew they wanted to dance, play music and draw. And so conceptions were discovered in each student's mind then worked out publicly with the class so they could do all three. They set the plan into action.

They moved to the *expression* stage as they begin to work out concrete examples through a form of representation (Eisner, 2004). This time, the form of representation was a performance of dancing and drawing. Expression communicates thoughts or feelings so that others may understand what the artist is conveying. In other words, it is made public by moving outside of the mind of the artist and into a form that can be seen and heard by others. The expression stage suggests a final form or composition that the ideas take, but this may or may not be true. The expression stage may be revisited, or changed at any point in the visual cycle of inquiry.

The students only practiced their performance once before they performed it. They figured out the difficult parts and held a great class discussion on how to make it run more smoothly. With a plan that was deeply considered, the students performed with aplomb. Parents, teachers, students, and administrators all came to see the performance. It only lasted three or four minutes, but it was well worth the hours and going through the process.

The reflection stage suggests careful thought. It is the process of taking into consideration previous actions, decisions, and ideas. When the students began conceiving the idea for the performance, when it was halfway through, and as it moved to its final form, the students engaged in reflection about their work. The students reflected through conversation with their peers throughout the lesson and just before their performance. Consequently, they were

constantly doubling back to earlier stages trying to solve the artistic problem by reflecting on what its strengths and weaknesses were.

The final step, re-vision, like the general cycle of inquiry, thrusts the students back into the cycle, thus creating a spiral of learning (Siegesmund, 2004). This is a very important component of Siegesmund's visual cycle of inquiry. In the art classroom, teachers often compose lessons where the students produce a single work of art and they have only one chance at an assignment. Visual inquiry might then suggest that even at the elementary level, art should be revisited and revised. This lesson approached the topic of music, art, feeling and form in several different manners. Re-vision and reflection drove the cycle through a spiral of experiences, for one must reflect upon experience in order to have an experience (Dewey, 1910). John Dewey writes that reflective thought "is the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1910, p. 6). Therefore, re-vision is a conscious, voluntary thought and in education, it must be nurtured for students to remember their experiences. Revision is what provides the student with the link to the next inquiry. The day after the performance, students were already thinking about how they would do the performance again and how this lesson would lead into the next lesson.

Although the visual cycle of inquiry moves in a general clock-like direction, it is not necessary that the artist strictly adhere to this guideline or this sequence. At any point, the students may double back, begin again, reflect, or start anew. In the study, reflection occurred during perception, conception, and expression. Towards the end of the project when new questions and problems arose, the rotations of the cycle of visual inquiry began to look less round. The cycle at times looked quite messy and at other times it actually began to spiral, as the problem got closer to a solution.

The Democratic/Dialogical Classroom

Research Question #2: How does creating a dialogical/democratic art classroom support inquiry-based learning?

As an example of the dialogical process that the teachers were trying to instill on the students, the teachers engaged them in democratic ideals. To finish out one of the classes, the students decided to do individual drawing to music, this time on paper – a more permanent artwork. As stated before, the teachers organized a democratic voting system to choose the song for this lesson. This process took longer than anticipated because of the students' high energy and disagreements from the democratic process. The teachers felt it was essential to choose the song as a class, so that the students could begin taking ownership of the lesson.

The process of selecting the song was also an exercise in civic values and cooperative dialogue. Although sometimes time intensive, it was an essential component of the dialogical classroom.

A dialogical classroom is an environment where students construct knowledge and create meaning through thoughtful discussion and reflection. Within this lesson, there were multiple points where student dialogue created meaning and steered the discussion toward its final destination. Zander (2004) pointed out that, "Dialogue is a relationship that requires time, commitment and mutual respect" (p.49). Nurturing the atmosphere required to generate meaningful dialogue demanded an investment by the teachers and the students. Zander (2004) goes on to say, "driven by assessment, learning goals, and the requirement to teach a certain amount of information within a specific time period, the standard curriculum leaves little room for creating dialogical relationships" (p. 51). The teachers decided to create a classroom where open dialogue was encouraged and valued; therefore, time was set aside for this exercise in democratic values. It would not have been enough to allow a five-minute discussion if there just happened to be time left in the period. Dialogue was important and deserved a specific allotment of time.

The teachers' role in these discussions was carefully balanced so as to allow the students to direct the content but at the same time maintaining the fruitfulness of the dialogue. The teachers often initiated the conversation in order to start it, or steered the discussion back to an important issue. Although the teachers were unafraid to allow the discussion to enter unknown territory, the teachers did not let it move to irrelevant matters or dwell too long on specific details. Rogers (2006) described the teacher's role in a dialogical class by saying, "The task of the teacher is to listen to the sense and knowledge that students are constructing *as they construct it*, inquiring into their understanding so that appropriate interventions (questions, suggestions, materials, silence) can be made" (p. 211). Rodgers touched upon how the teacher can be a participant in the discussion as well. Zander (2004) recommended that teachers, "learn to speak from their heart and with a non-judgmental point of view. Teachers should also aim to share ideas rather than impose their own thinking on students" (p.50). Taking a less authoritative role, the teachers often entered the discussion. As Zander mentioned, though, it was important that the teachers shared in a way that was contributory rather than judgmental. The teachers held a great deal of knowledge, life experiences, and unique perspectives that contributed to the dialogue. By appropriately contributing to the discussion, the teachers made the experience more beneficial for everybody.

Aesthetic and Imaginative Approaches to Inquiry

Research Question #3: How does an inquiry-based art classroom support and extend creativity and imagination?

For Dewey (1934), the aesthetic is an intrinsic quality for reasoning and experience in human beings. However, only given the right conditions and opportunities can aesthetic experiences remain accessible to everyone. If children are not given the opportunity for aesthetic experiences, development may be severely hampered in areas of reasoning and visual literacy (Heid, 2008). Dewey (1934) claims that this aesthetic quality is simply a quality of experience or a way of learning to attend to one's world at any point in time and any given situation. He suggests that there is an aesthetic quality that belongs to any inquiry, whether it is scientific or centered in art as long it is based in experience.

Dewey (1938) focuses on the aesthetic nature of inquiry by suggesting that inquiry arises from one's prior experiences, feelings, intuition, and imaginative background. Dewey suggests that it is inquiry that regulates problem solving in all domains. Inquiry-based learning and problem solving are the rudiments of qualitative thought. Qualitative thought is concerned with ideas, concepts, categories, and formal logic. For Dewey, it is a natural human trait to organize and make sense of one's world. Similarly, there is an equally strong tendency to do it affectively. Aesthetic qualities can be assigned to any inquiry as long as it is in a state of unrest. Langer (1957) suggests that when the nervous system reaches a critical pitch, the process is felt. This critical pitch is part of the sense systems, seeing, hearing, tasting etc. When this process is felt, it is natural to ask why. Asking questions and engaging in inquiry is a natural human phenomenon (Dewey, 1934).

Egan (2005) suggests that engaging students' imaginations is crucial to successful teaching and learning. He claims that "stimulating the imagination is not an alternative educational activity to be argued for in competition with other claims; it is a prerequisite to making any activity educational" (Egan & Nader, 1988, p. xi). Egan purports that one crucial purpose of education is to wrestle against the many things that make one's experiences inconsequential. He feels that the soul of teaching is the daily struggle to develop the aesthetic sensibilities of children by engaging them in emotional and imaginative teaching.

When Egan (2005) hears of particularly imaginative teaching, he finds that there are usually some cognitive tools at play. Egan suggests that there are important cognitive tools that may be used for teaching that engage students' imaginations. The tools that Egan suggests for use in stimulating students' imaginations are: story; metaphor; binary opposites; rhyme, rhythm, and pattern; jokes and humor; mental imagery; play; mystery; and embryonic tools of literacy. In this study, the teachers engaged the students in story, play and mystery while they were exploring who had stolen the Kandinsky painting. This enthralled the students as they played along taking their roles seriously, imagining how they might be able to figure out which painting was stolen. Monica and Chris were playful with the students and easily laughed with them as they did quirky things or came up with something silly. But, the most important

cognitive tool that they used for stimulating the imaginations of the students was mental imagery.

They allowed the students to engage in mental imagery in order to conjure up what the performance might look like and empowered them to generate many ideas. Students spent time at the white board drawing ideas for the performance and engaging the class with concepts and thoughts. Engaging students through imagination by taking advantage of their experiences gave shape to the lesson. Through mental imagery and play, students functioned beyond their average abilities. They could pretend that they were grown up and now curators or policemen exploring the rules of their community or classroom.

Making Meaning through Visual Culture Art Education

Research Question #4: How might an inquiry-based elementary art curriculum incorporate visual culture?

Teaching art history in a linear fashion in high school and even with elementary students may often be at odds with more contemporary methods and ideas for teaching. Traditional lessons in art history are so entrenched in art appreciation and aesthetic valuing that it may be hard for art teachers to learn to focus instead on the ideas that are put forward by visual culture art education (VCAE). Monica and Chris were not given a ready-made curriculum in order to teach their classes. Instead they were invited to create lessons around their understanding of visual culture and to try to instill meaning making for young children in the classroom.

Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) suggest that a comprehensive art education program include art production, aesthetics, art criticism, and art history along with three more foci. These three foci include: visual culture, new technology, and personal creativity within a social context. According to Anderson and Milbrandt, these foci are essential for understanding contemporary issues in art education.

Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) suggest that this increasingly visual world is the focus of the visual culture approach to art education and that “To succeed in contemporary culture, people must be able to ‘read’ this constructed environment, interpret it, and use the visual signs they find in it” (p. 44). In other words, Anderson and Milbrandt are suggesting that visual culture is a literacy in which a language must be studied and learned in order to be fluent in this contemporary society. As in all language and literacy study, students can effectively learn it when they are very young (Oring, 2000). Teaching visual culture art education to elementary students may be important and necessary for a complete education. In this study, teaching students through a VCAE approach to children who have previously had traditional approaches of art education experiences was daunting at best. According to one administrator

at the charter school, general expectations from children and teachers were to “complete one work of art in its entirety each class period, study classic Western works of art, and to sit quietly, do their work under a one artist, one work of art mentality” (transcription from video tape, November 2006). This new approach got everyone stirred up. The students used up lots of time trying to figure out where these new teachers’ boundaries were. They figured out that the study of art in this classroom was not going to be about looking at works of art that were reserved for special privileged individuals that were inaccessible to them. They figured out that this class would be about their own art and that their art and the works of others can be part of their own everyday lives.

Once they figured out that Monica and Chris had high expectations, and that they encouraged and supported a social atmosphere in the art classroom, they were well on their way towards contemporary studies engagement. Duncum (2001) suggests that visual images in the field of visual culture studies are viewed in a broad context of different social processes. Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) suggest that visual culture art education (VCAE) places meaning not only on the visual object and on the viewer’s response, but also on the relationship that the viewer and the visual object share within a social context. *Dancing with Line* was a lesson that effectively challenged traditional approaches to art education by including a social dimension within the group of children.

Discussion

This lesson provides a clear and convincing argument as to how inquiry-based teaching works in the art classroom. Much has been written about multiage and inquiry-based learning in the general education classroom, however there is an insufficient amount of literature that discusses multiage and inquiry-based learning in the art classroom (Heid, 2005, Broome, 2006). Inquiry-based models and multiage learning were effective ways for students to work in a social setting. Students worked together setting up their own questions and then problem solving to achieve answers.

The inquiry process gave students the latitude to practice individual creativity and certainly allowed room for children’s imaginative processes as they planned their own lesson, created their own problems, and expressed their answers through their performance. The democratic process that the teachers supported helped the students and supported imaginative approaches to the lesson. The visual cycle of inquiry came into effect as the students rotated through the five-step process and re-visioned how the lesson could be better. As a group, this was done through linguistic means as the group had to communicate with one another to achieve their goal.

In its strictest sense, Monica and Chris did not engage their classroom in VCAE. The students did not intently study everyday objects or were exposed to visual artifacts rooted in popular culture. But, in a loose sense, they did; and maybe this loose sense is how the students may have begun to make meaning in their own lives. Monica and Chris applied much that they had studied about making meaning in the art classroom. Specifically, by helping children have aesthetic experiences with their own art as well as the art of their peers, students learned to make learning authentic and relevant. They helped their students form a relationship between themselves and the art they were making within a social context.

The teachers led from behind, facilitating this lesson instead of controlling it. They remained loose enough to allow the lesson to unfold and in the direction that the students desired. Often, teachers tend to teach the way they have been taught. Sometimes the hardest part of teaching is reflecting on how a lesson went, how it could be reinvented to make it better, and how to help students make meaning in their lives. Becoming a critically reflective teacher is demanding (Brookfield, 1995). Sometimes scrapping or at least changing a lesson or curriculum with which we are comfortable teaching is what needs to be done to make learning more meaningful in this ever changing world. Art education provides a unique opportunity in visual culture studies. Teachers can design curriculum around the ever-present popular culture and visual artifacts - the very same objects that another teacher might battle. Cell phones are not going away; video games, computers, and the Internet are integral parts of most children's lives. Walking around malls and wearing name brand clothes have supplanted playing in neighborhoods and making one's own garments (Freedman, 2003). Art teachers can ask themselves, "how can I make popular culture and visual images work for me rather than against me?" How many of us actually use these things as opportunities for learning rather than constantly fighting their existence?

Working with children and using a democratic process is messy. It is messy with adults too, maybe even messier. One can only visualize the kind of a mess it may have looked like when our framers of the Constitution gathered to imagine a new set of ideals for a new Nation. It takes a long time to work through democracy in a classroom and it takes a lot of patience to let students work things out without too much interference from teachers. In short, it takes practice. But with the practice, students gain skills and come to understand the process of democratic decision making, especially when the results are so positive. By the end of the school year, the practice that Monica and Chris gave the students in the dialogical classroom began to be embraced by students. Students were taking turns, talking, and realizing that everyone would have a chance to talk so they did not seem to mind waiting. It was still messy, but it seemed to be worth letting the process unfold.

Friedman (2006) claims that the most imaginative and creative societies are countries that practice democracy. Friedman cites several examples in his book *The World is Flat*. He compared democratic countries such as India and the United States to dictatorships where a few very rich people govern the masses, such as Iran and Iraq. His claim is simple. When a government allows its citizens to pursue their dreams, to imagine all the possibilities, that society believes that “authority comes from the bottom up, and people can and do feel self-empowered to improve their lot. People living in such contexts tend to spend their time focusing on what to do next, not on whom to blame next” (p. 562). If schools were microcosms of society then maybe it would be wise to practice these democratic ideals in order to support creative and imaginative citizens.

The performance in this study happened to fall on Veterans Day and so this off-the-wall happening followed the celebration. But that is what inquiry is all about, trusting the student citizens of our schools enough to recognize their own desire to learn and direct their learning in a way that is personally meaningful and valuable. The veterans that were honored that day protected our democracy, a form of government that empowers its citizens to seek out and realize their potential free from interference. Inquiry-based learning may be an important way to celebrate what makes our communities great, the concept of democracy.

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