

Picture This! Meaningful Art in the Classroom

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Abstract

Picture This! Meaningful Art in the Classroom.

What is the value of integrating the arts into the students' learning experiences? Can art be used to positively affect students' short-term and long-term acquisition of knowledge? Is art an effective motivational tool? This inquiry explores the integration of the arts into the social studies curriculum of a fifth grade class and the associated benefits. For this study the arts were introduced as an integral part of the unit as it became a medium through which the students learned, represented their understandings, and were assessed. My students and I were able to explore how fun and educational the arts can be!

Inquiry Brief

Purpose: The purpose of my inquiry project is to discover the value of incorporating the arts into the students learning experiences. I am hoping that this inquiry will lead me to discoveries and new knowledge about the positives and negatives involving the incorporation of art into the curriculum. Therefore, this inquiry is intended to expand and enrich my teacher strategies and tools so that I am able to offer the students in my classroom a rich and engaging learning experience.

Research Question: What is the value of incorporating the arts (crafts, artwork, projects) in student learning experiences?

Sub-questions: Can art be used to motivate students? Can art be used as an effective teaching strategy to engage students for the duration of a lesson? Will the inclusion of art help students to learn and/or understand the academic content? Will the inclusion of art have a positive effect on long-term or short-term acquisition of knowledge? Will art enrich the lessons or will the art simply supplement the content? Will art slow down the lessons, thus the students' learning, or will the extra time spent with artwork more fully develop their understandings of the content?

Data Collection:

- Student work (evidence of their learning)
- Student surveys before and after using art in the students' learning experiences. Student surveys before and after particular lessons.
- Questioning or interviewing students while they are working. Interviewing individual students before and after the learning experiences.
- Tape recordings of whole group discussions during lessons.
- Consistently recorded sweeps of the classroom for the duration of whole lessons.

Data Interpretation: I will collect student work to determine the extent and depth of their learning while art is being integrated into their learning experiences. In addition, I will tape record whole group discussions to further determine the extent and depth of learning that is occurring for the class as a whole. I will conduct student surveys before, during and after the time period in which I integrate the art into the lessons, and compare the responses. These surveys will provide insight into how I should go about incorporating the art and how the students respond to the art once it has been integrated. I will question and interview individual students during and after their learning experiences to determine the value of the art for the students. In order to determine whether the students remain engaged for the duration of the lessons, I will use the data recorded from continuous and consistent sweeps of the students during the lessons.

Literature/Experts to Consult:

- Books, articles and research on the integration of art into the regular classroom curriculum.
- Mary Murphy (Penn State Professor in the Arts)
- Art teacher and fifth grade teachers at Radio Park Elementary

Timeline:

- *Weeks 1:* Conduct background research and consult the experts listed above. Gather ideas and techniques for incorporating art into the students' learning experiences.
- *Week 2:* Continue background research. Begin student interviews and surveys prior to the introduction of art into the lessons. Develop a plan for incorporating art.
- *Week 3:* Begin incorporating art into lessons. Conduct student interviews and surveys. Record data from sweeps and group discussions.
- *Week 4-5:* Continue the incorporation of art and data collection. Begin to gather student work for evidence.
- *Week 6:* Spring Break - - Organize data and prepare post-surveys.
- *Week 7:* Continue the incorporation of art and data collection. Experiment with different strategies for introducing and including the art.
- *Week 8:* Begin follow-up interviews and surveys. Conclude evidence collection.
- *Weeks 9-10:* Sort and analyze data. Determine findings, conclusions, and new wonderings.
- *Week 12-13:* Work on writing inquiry draft.
- *Week 14:* Have inquiry draft proofread by mentor and PDA. Work on final draft.
- *Week 15:* Finish final draft and present.

Background Information

Description of the Teaching Context . . .

This inquiry project encompasses a diverse class of twenty-four fifth grade students who have many different cultural and family backgrounds, including, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. In this self-contained classroom, there are 4 students that attend ESL classes and four students that receive learning support. In general, the students are respectful, polite, well behaved and empathetic towards the feelings and ideas of all members of the classroom. While there are 5-6 high achieving students in our class, the majority of students are average in their academic accomplishments. However, all students are concerned about their academic success and, at many times, are very self-conscious. The environment outside of the school is demanding with high academic expectations. Parents and community play a vital role in the students' learning experiences and schooling.

My fifth grade students have many rich experiences in the arts and a majority of them are talented in this area. Fifteen of the students attend music lessons at the school, and, in addition, six receive lessons outside of the school. When working on art projects, the students are very intricate and detailed in their work. The final outcome reflects their effort and carefulness in completing their work. I have received many comments from other teachers in the building, including the art and music teachers, about how artistically inclined this group of students is. In addition, I have heard several compliments concerning the amount of effort the students put forth in their studies of the arts. When these students return from their music or art specials, they are excited and enthusiastic about the school day. They are excited to discuss what they have accomplished in class, and they are motivated to engage in other subject areas.

The Social Studies unit for this fifth grade class is entitled "The Story of US." Since the beginning of the year, the students have been learning about the history of United States. The year began with the arrival of the Pilgrims and the settlement of Jamestown. Prior to beginning this inquiry project, we had just covered the signing of the constitution and began a chapter in the unit entitled "Journeys." This chapter involves events in the 1800's, including, the Industrial Revolution, advancements in transportation, and the westward movement and expansion. The written lesson plans for this chapter in the unit focuses on skills such as researching, note taking,

and writing with little emphasis on the arts. As preparation for middle school, the unit emphasizes these skills and leaves little room for creativity.

What led me to this particular inquiry project and wonderings . . .

I have always been intrigued and interested by the arts throughout my life. In fact, I almost took on Art Education as a major due to my fascination. When I chose the career path of Elementary Education, I was enthusiastic about including artwork in my classroom to enrich the learning experience. As I started my internship in a fifth grade classroom, I began to notice that several of the students in my classroom shared the same feelings about art. When there were breaks or wait time, I would see a majority of the students drawing pictures, creating origami, or doing other bits of artwork. By winter break, it was clear to me that my students enjoyed the arts, and many were artistically inclined. The students seemed to spend more time, thought and effort on work when it contained an artistic component.

My wondering truly emerged with a Social Studies project that the students were creating as a part of their history unit “A Story of US.” The students had been studying the colonial period of the United States. One of the projects used by the other fifth grade teachers is for the students to construct colonial villages; therefore, my mentor teacher and I had the students construct colonial villages on sheets of thick poster board. As the students worked on the project, we noticed that many of the villages had things that were not characteristic of colonial villages in America. Eventually the students became caught-up in details, such as, making cows, ducks, pigs, oxen and other animals. Although some of these animals were characteristic of either the New England, Middle or Southern Colonies, the students’ focus was not on the relevance of the animals. They were merely creating a variety of animals to decorate their board. After the students had completed their projects (which took almost three weeks), we had a show-and-tell time in which one member from each group was randomly chosen to describe whether their colony was representative of the New England, Southern or Middle colonies. The students were able to point out a few things that represented those colonies; however, a majority of their project was not intended to fit-in with any particular colony. One student constructed a large stonewall with an archway for around their project! This wall gave a mid-evil appearance to the colony.

After this lesson was finished, my mentor and I discussed the hollowness of the lesson and how artificiality of the project. It appeared that the students did not link their prior knowledge of

colonial times to the creation of these 3D projects. It made me wonder: How much did this project really benefit the students in their knowledge and understandings of the colonies and their differences? How could this lesson have been changed so that it would have been more meaningful? Should we have set guidelines? If we set guidelines, would that deflate the students' enthusiasm for the project? Perhaps we should have had the students research their colonies a bit more so that they could have further justified their final projects?

After this discussion, I began to wonder not only how I could use art to motivate the students, but also how I could integrate the art in a meaningful way. Can art be used to effectively and meaningfully teach the academic content to the students? Will the art help them to further visualize and understand what they are learning? As I thought about this more, I began to get more excited about finding the answers. I knew that I had my wondering.

This inquiry is important to me, because integrating art is a teaching strategy that I would like to use in my classroom regardless of the grade. However, before using art in my classroom, I would like to determine the benefits in relation to academic learning. Understanding the values of art will allow me to determine how often arts should be used in the classroom. There are a variety of ways in which the arts can take part in the curriculum. The arts can be used to supplement a lesson or the content being taught. Art can become the focus of the lesson and the main medium for learning. In addition, art can be used as a tangible means for students to demonstrate what they have learned. I intend to explore these means of integrating the art to determine the values, benefits, and drawbacks of such integration.

What others have discovered about this topic . . .

- - Literature - -

There is a vast amount of literature concerning the integration of art into the classroom and the values it adds to students' learning experiences. However, despite the large number of pieces of literature and research concerning art integration in existence, most of this research only focuses on HOW art should be integrated to be meaningful. The integration of art can have numerous benefits; however, the outcomes depend on the manner in which the art is integrated. Renaissance in the Classroom (Burnaford, Aprill, & Wiess, 2001) stresses the importance of how art is integrated into the curriculum. When integrating art according to their formula, there are several benefits, particularly in the Social Sciences:

“The arts provide varied, connected, and increasingly challenging opportunities to generate and represent knowledge over time. The arts function as a way of committing concepts and content to memory. The arts present concrete evidence of learning. Contemporary arts experiences represent history and culture in the curriculum. Historical art forms help students reflect on contemporary life. Studying, experiencing, reflecting on, and re-creating the arts of different periods are powerful ways to bring life worldviews from other times and places (p. 13).”

This excerpt points out three benefits of integrating the arts. Students may represent what they have learned and understand in the final form of a piece of art. This provides them with a motivating and creative way of demonstrating what they know and understand. Second, using art creates a link between the content being learned and the students' experiences. The students' acquisition of content is enhanced when the students have an artistic experience to link it to. Lastly, art can be used to teach students about past and present cultures. Students may examine artwork from a particular time period or make their own in order to gain a clear understanding of that time period.

In addition, the authors' theory is that if teachers expand their repertoire of teaching practices to include more attention to students' capacities to use their musical, spatial, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and bodily/kinesthetic intelligences, they may reach more children. The authors relate the incorporation of the arts in teaching to that of Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences. The

arts are yet another avenue in which some students' learning excels. In addition, their claim is that since the arts make learning tangible and visible, they are a powerful medium for learners. Learners are able to recognize that they are learning. Learning is made visible. In spite of all their claims, the authors openly admit the following about the integration of the arts: "We are just beginning to understand its subtleties, promise, complexity, and limitations."

This piece of literature demonstrates that there are several benefits related to integrating the arts into the curriculum; however, the key is making the art meaningful. Meaningful art depends on the interaction between the type of art, the content, the students, and the way the art is integrated. Renaissance in the Classroom, provides suggestions for integrating art in the most meaningful way in order to enrich the students' learning experiences. Their plan for art integration focuses on creating all-encompassing thematic units that reaches into all subject areas. This particular approach will not be similar to the method I intend to use for integrating art during my inquiry project. Rather than creating a thematic unit, I intend on simply incorporating activities involving the arts into the Social Studies curriculum. Creating a thematic-unit based on art integration will be a step that I will take in the future.

On a similar note, Pamela Stephens and Nancy Walkup in their book Bridging the Curriculum Through Art (2000), stress "*Art-based lessons go beyond the idea of "art projects" and encompass observing art, thinking about art, talking about art, and creating art while making significant connections to other content areas* (p. 11). The benefits of integrating art rely on the method in which art is used to enhance and interconnect concepts. Stephens and Walkup strongly argue the idea of creating thematic units based on art. Within these thematic units, individual lessons are linked together by a common art theme. The unit should encourage students to meaningfully explore a subject, rather than simply reiterating what they have already been told.

The authors claim that art can be used in such a way that students are encouraged to create, investigate, appreciate, and question art in ways that require critical thinking skills. They assert that the arts are a powerful medium for learning when lessons, units, and subjects are interconnected through art. Using art as the central focus through art-based interdisciplinary units can interconnect concepts of the curriculum while making the concepts over-arching concepts clear and accessible to students. In addition to benefits previously mentioned, the authors claim that art offers the following values in the students' learning experiences:

1. Learning becomes cumulative and holistic when art is taught as a subject within the general curriculum.
2. An interrelated curriculum strategy exemplifies substantive measurable learning experiences.
3. Creates an educational environment that contributes to improve learning outcomes.

Ursula Ensign in her publication Art is for everyone (1994) discusses other benefits of integrating the arts, particularly for students with learning disabilities or for those who struggle with writing. She suggests that the emphasis of the artwork should not be on the finished product, but rather on the involvement with the materials and the making of the project. Placing emphasis on the appearance or quality of the final project may get in the way of the self-discovery, learning, and individual expression that may occur. Artwork that has a fixed outcome and lacks individuality also lacks personal involvement, self-expression and originality. Therefore, Ensign claims that the art integration should focus on the creation of the art and how it connects to the content, rather than what the finished artwork is “suppose” to look like. The art should be a medium for learning.

- - Interview of Professional - -

Judy Shue – Radio Park Elementary Music Teacher:

March 2005 - - When questioned about the value of incorporating the arts, particularly music, this is the response I received from Mrs. Shue:

Music enforces the students' learning in all subject areas:

Art - - Rhythm is common to music art and bodily recordings can stimulate creative art. It is a response to artistic styles.

Science - - Sounds and recordings from nature are represented through musical instruments or acoustics. Music can represent rain, the sea, forests and clouds.

Health and Safety - - Songs can be used to teach about health. Students learn about correct posture in singing and breathing techniques.

Language Arts - - Music is directly related to poetry and can be used to teach rhythm and rhyme. Music is composed for poetry and aspects of choral reading. The reading of words of songs can be an experience in the process of improving reading skills and music illustrates literature.

Learning through the arts provides a media for hands on activities. An active and enthusiastic student is successful to his or her positive potential. It allows a student to get in touch with his or her emotional, physical and cultural qualities.

Music provides a means for describing experiences aesthetic, emotional and cultural diversities. It can be away for students to express the past and the present. Arts can be integrated to increase long-term recall of the content. For instance, there are raps, songs, and canon rounds which can help with the learning (states, capitals, number facts, presidents, forms, combinations of numbers, rhyming words, syllables, etc.). The arts can be used as a motivation tool. If the talent of the student can be discovered and success becomes apparent, the student becomes motivated to do even more study, practice, and sharing.

In addition, music is used for culminating activities of units of works. Music aids in understanding ideals, religion, traditions of contemporary and past civilizations and cultures. Music can teach history and patriotism. Music describes geographical and climatic conditions of various countries. Children can make musical instruments and costumes to portray the life of peoples of the past and present. Music is a unifying factor and moral builder. It aids personality development and it can relieve tensions and alleviate fatigue.

My Wondering . . .

My inquiry question focuses on the values related to art integration. I am seeking to discover the value art can have in students' learning experiences. I hope to find how art can motivate students, as well as, how art can increase comprehension and acquisition of content so that it is meaningful to them. I will integrate art into my lessons to see if the art can be used to make ties between the students' context and background knowledge to the content they are learning.

What is the value of incorporating the arts in the students' learning experiences?

Sub-questions I would like to answer . . .

Can art be used to motivate students at the beginning of a lesson?

If so, can art be used as an effective teaching strategy to engage students for the duration of a lesson?

Will the inclusion of art help students to learn and/or understand the academic content?

Will incorporating art into the students' learning experiences benefit the students in long term recall of academic content?

Will art enrich the lessons or will the art simply supplement the content?

Will art slow down the lessons, thus the students' learning, or will the extra time spent with artwork more fully develop their understandings of the content?

Will art better enable students to express their understandings, thoughts, and knowledge?

My Inquiry Plan

Design of My Inquiry Project

I decided to implement my inquiry project in only one area of the fifth grade curriculum in order to maintain consistent and clear results. Since my initial wondering had been sparked by an occurrence in a Social Studies lesson, I chose to focus my inquiry project in this subject area. In addition, several publications and texts suggested the integration of the arts into the Social Studies curriculum. Marjorie Manifold in her publication Art Education in the Social Studies (1995) claims that “Knowledge of both art and social studies may be developed sequentially and cumulatively [. . .] The visual arts are specifically useful in the teaching of history courses or historic themes.” Therefore, for five weeks, I carried out my inquiry project through designing and implementing a series of lessons through the Social Studies curriculum.

I created two sets of lessons in order to explore different aspects of my wondering. The first set of lessons that I designed was intended to compare lessons that involved the arts to lessons that did not incorporate an artistic component. This sub-section of my inquiry project would allow me to determine some of the values of integrating the arts. I designed several lessons that did not involve the arts so that I could compare the short-term and long-term outcomes of both sets of lessons. These lessons focused on activities such as, journal writing, taking notes, creating webs, and watching videos. I made sure to include a wide variety of activities in the lessons and multiple means for the students to acquire the content and understandings that I desired. I wanted to make sure that I was not being bias to one set of lessons. I provided students with multiple means of learning the content in all lessons (**See Appendix A for first set of lessons**).

In the second set of lessons, I integrated the arts in a variety of ways to explore how the method in which art is integrated would affect the students' motivation and long-term acquisition. For this inquiry project, I incorporated the arts in a variety of ways in order to determine the full range of values. In some lessons, the art is a means for the students to demonstrate what they have learned. When I read the “Bobbin Girl” story to my students, they demonstrated what they had learned and what they were thinking by drawing pictures and designing ads. In other lessons, the learning was based around the art activity. For example, in the “Card Factory” simulation, the students role-played as factory workers in the 1800’s and then demonstrated what they had learned in the form of a journal entry. In other lessons, the art serves as a supplement to the learning in

order to further engage the students in the learning. For example, in “The Antebellum South” lesson, the students drew a picture to represent a story with the culminating activity being a reader's theater supplemented by the pictures. Even the task of note taking was supplemented with a tangible art activity in a lesson. I had the students create note-taking sheets from construction paper that allowed them to be creative even when completing the daunting task of note-taking (**See Appendix B for second set of lessons**).

Methods for Data Collection . . .

I practiced many methods of data collection in order to fully explore the value, benefits, and/or drawbacks of integrating the arts into my fifth grade class' Social Studies curriculum. Data collection was conducted in three steps: before, during, and after.

BEFORE:

Prior to implementing my inquiry project, I designed and conducted two student surveys. The intent of these surveys was to determine my students' thoughts and feelings about previous Social Studies lessons and the subject as a whole. I was hoping to discover which lessons the students were most successful in and which lessons they enjoyed the most. I also wanted to discover my students' overall attitudes toward the subject of Social Studies to see if their attitudes would alter due to the integration of the arts. In the first survey I asked students to rate various activities we had done in class, including, projects, plays, poems, and simulations. In the second survey, I asked students to rate their feelings about Social Studies in general, the content we are learning, and to choose lessons based on how much they liked them and how much they learned (**See Appendix C for pre-surveys and analysis**).

DURING:

The majority of my data collection occurred during the inquiry project. While implementing the lessons, I wanted to collect evidence that would allow me to determine student engagement. For each lesson, I conducted a series of consistent data collection methods:

Sweep Record Forms:

In order to determine student engagement and motivation during the lessons, either my mentor teacher or I filled out sweep forms. Every five minutes the classroom was scanned and student engagement was recorded. Through this data collection, I was intending to be able to compare student engagement across lessons and to explore the depth of engagement for each lesson (**See Appendix D for recorded sweep forms**).

Student Interviews:

I chose six students from my class to conduct 10-minute interviews with after each lesson conducted for my inquiry project. I chose a range of students with different academic achievements in order to gauge interest and learning across all types of learners. I chose a girl and a boy from each sub-group in my class: lower achieving students (Students 5 and 6, one a resource room student), average achieving students (Students 3 and 4), and high-achieving students (Students 1 and 2). Therefore, I would be able to determine if the art integration would affect one sub-group of students more than the others. I tape recorded the lessons and later typed them into documents in order to analyze the data in a way that is more tangible and comparable. (**See Appendix E for student interviews.**) I asked each student the following set of questions after each lesson:

How did you feel about the lesson? Why?

Were you engaged during the lesson (able to stay focused)? Why?

How much do you feel you learned?

How much do you feel you will remember? Why?

What are some specifics that you learned from the lesson that were new and interesting?

Student Work and Assessment:

In each lesson there was at least one way for students to represent what they had learned. For example, in the "Underground Railroad" lesson, the students were to create a map and replica of a station during the time period. The accuracy of their maps and station demonstrated their depth of understanding. I systematically assessed the students' finished work by identifying key understandings that I would look for in each piece. I was able to compare the quality of student work across lessons. (**See Appendix F for samples of student work**)

Reflective Journals:

Along with assessing and analyzing student work, I wrote one or more reflective journals after each lesson. I reflected on occurrences during the lesson, as well as, made connections across other forms of data (interviews and student work). **(See Appendix G for assessment and reflective journals.)**

AFTER:

After I had finished implementing the lessons designed for my inquiry project, I followed-up with two post-surveys. The surveys served three purposes: to test the students long-term acquisition of content; to identify lessons students liked/enjoyed the most; and to identify lessons that the students felt they learned the most during. Due to time constraints, I was only able to wait until two weeks after the lessons, so that I could test for long term acquisition of content **(See Appendix H for Post-Surveys and Analysis).**

Analyzing the Data . . .

When collecting data, I was intending to collect information and items that would benefit in determining the value of the integration of the arts. There were two outcomes that I was looking for in particular when analyzing the data I had collected: (1) did the integration of art lead to higher engagement and motivational levels; and (2) did the integration of art provide students with the experiences needed for long-term acquisition of content.

I began to analyze my data by comparing and contrasting the data collected from each lesson. In order to see if higher student engagement and motivation was a value of integrating the arts, I compared the recorded sweep forms to see how student engagement varied between the lessons. I was curious to see if the integration of art increased student engagement and if the way in which the art was integrated played a role, as well.

The interviews that I conducted with six of my fifth grade students, became very important pieces of evidence as I began to analyze data and formulate my claims. During the interviews, students were very truthful about how they felt about lessons, how interested they were during the lessons, and how much they learned from the lessons. I used this information to make claims about the students' engagement and motivation. I asked the students to share how they felt during the

lesson and how interested they were with the content and the activities that they were engaged in. I was looking to see whether the incorporation of an artistic component increased student motivation or engagement and how students felt about the activity.

In addition, the interviews allowed me to determine the extent of the students' short-term acquisition of content and their understandings. For each lesson, I chose key concepts, facts, and/or understandings as a goal for students to learn during the lesson. These selected concepts were based on the learning objectives set forth for each lesson. Along with each documented interview, I wrote a statement of learning goals that I had intended for students to acquire. By comparing the results of the interviews to these statements, I was able to clearly gauge the level of student understanding for each lesson. It is interesting to note, that as I was interviewing my fifth grade students, I noticed that they were very capable of discussing their own learning and thinking during the lessons. I interviewed several students in which their metacognition was very developed. It was amazing to hear how the students described their learning, particularly when comparing learning with to learning that lacked the creativity and visual aspects characteristic of the arts.

Student work was another major piece of data to be analyzed during the final stages of the project. I created a point system or rubric for each piece of student work. Points were based on key understandings demonstrated in the work and the amount of effort put forth in creating the piece. In combination with student interviews, I used the student work to make determinations about the quality of learning during each lesson and the amount of time and effort put into the work. Unlike the "Colonial Village" project mentioned above, I was looking to see if the artwork I designed for the students had depth and meaning.

Lastly, I used the post-interviews to determine the long-term acquisition of content and understandings. I analyzed the surveys by comparing the level or amount of information recalled from each lesson. I created a tally sheet for each question and recorded whether the responses were "detailed and accurate," "somewhat detailed and accurate," "inaccurate response," or "no response." This provided me with a clear image of the amount of information recalled for each lesson. At the end of the survey, I had asked students to mark the lesson they liked the most and the lesson they learned the most from. I tallied the responses and determined whether the students chose the lesson due the content or due to the activities during the lesson. I paid close attention to the explanations students gave for the lesson they learned the most from. Did they choose the lesson because the content was interesting? Or did they choose the lesson because the activity helped them to remember what they learned? (See **Appendix H for analysis of post-surveys**)

What I Learned and Now Know

Claims and What I Think I Now Know

Claim 1: Students' short-term and long-term acquisition of content was exemplified when the students had a tangible and personal experience with the arts that they could link their knowledge to. When carrying out my inquiry project, the affects of art on the long-term acquisition of content was my most prominent wondering; therefore, I have collected ample evidence on this particular claim. When comparing data across lessons, it was evident that the students remembered more information when there was an art project involved. The art helped them to remember what they had learned about, and more importantly, gave them a reason to remember. The art provided the students with a reason to learn the information from the lesson. During the "Underground Railroad" lesson, students needed to learn about how runaway slaves traveled and where they stayed in order to create their project. Their stations or safe houses were based on real-life places that they had to find and select based on the real-life route that they would be taking. In addition, students used journals and real-life accounts from runaway slaves to write their own entries and to design the hiding place they had to stay in. Weeks later, students were still able to discuss the routes they had taken, how they had traveled, the stations they had stopped at along the way, and famous people that had helped them on their journey.

Evidence to Support Claim from Active Research:

When looking across the data I had collected, it became quite evident that the students were learning and remembering more from lessons including the arts. I found this to be so in both short-term and long-term acquisition of the content. The interviews that I conducted with six of my students clearly showed the benefits in the short-term acquisition of content when art was integrated in the lessons. The discussions during the interviews were much richer with content and students were able to talk about the lesson in more depth than in the interviews following learning experiences that did not incorporate the arts.

What was even more compelling was that the students were able to identify this characteristic of learning in their own learning experiences. During interviews, several students

mentioned how the incorporation of the arts helped them to remember what they had learned in class compared to “just reading or writing.” Their ability to discuss their own thinking and to make claims about how they learn was amazing. After the lesson in which the students created a map and a station for the Underground Railroad, one student stated, *“This project really helped me to learn about the Underground Railroad. I will remember it more because I have actually done something to remind me of it. Mostly when I just write things down or listen, I forget it in about three or four days. But when I do an art project or something like that, I will always remember. I remember art projects because I like doing them and it is something that I can see.”* This student clearly states that she retains more from lessons when there is a tangible and personal experience to link it to. See Appendix E for student interviews.

In terms of long-term acquisition of content, my claim is highly supported by data I collected after I implemented the lessons through the post-surveys. In the first set of social studies lessons that I taught, two lessons did not involve the arts. After analyzing the results from the post survey, I discovered that more than one half of the class was unable to accurately repeat information from these two lessons. Most students left the question blank or inaccurately responded. In addition, most of the students were unable to recall even the key concepts from the lessons (See analysis of Post-Survey 1 in Appendix H). The responses clearly show that the students retained little from the lessons. In contrast, the amount and accuracy of information the students recalled from the lessons involving the arts was at a much higher rate. Responses were more in depth and students were able to recall key concepts from the lesson.

Evidence to Support Claim from Literature:

In the text Renaissance in the Classroom (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001) the authors clearly state the benefits of incorporating the arts into students’ learning experiences. They believe that children will learn more if they are engaged in some purposeful activity, rather than just completing tasks for the teacher to view and assess. Students need a purpose that is real and useful in the world in order to feel better about themselves. The students will become thinkers as well as doers. More bluntly, the authors state:

The arts function as a way of committing concepts and content to memory. . . [Experience with the arts] brings subjects alive for learners by incorporating a wide array of compelling visual, aural, tactile, and kinesthetic activities into the generation of new knowledge, thereby, providing enough vivid sense memories to make new learning memorable (2001, p.

46).

This quote clearly supports my claim by describing how the nature of art and the experiences created through art increase the students' acquisition of content. In addition, the authors speak of the role of art in the multiple intelligences theory. If teachers expand the repertoire of teaching practices to include more attention to Gardner's seven intelligences, we as teachers may reach more children. Incorporating the arts will further build on the students' strengths, particularly if their dominant strength is in the arts, and will equip them to learn more fully. The processes of the arts help to create the environment needed for learning to occur and for the brain to be engaged in a complex way.

Claim 2: Art can be incorporated into students' learning experiences in a way that it encourages them to interact with and respond to the content of the lesson. While integrating the arts in my lesson, I focused on making the art meaningful. In other words, I was attempting to accentuate the students' learning experiences with the arts. I discovered that art could be integrated so that it motivates the students to interact with the content.

I designed two lessons, in particular, to encourage the students to become involved with the content. These lessons were "The Antebellum South" and the "Underground Railroad." See Appendix B for the lesson plans.

Evidence to Support Claim from Active Research:

Based on observations and student work, it was clear that the artwork from several of my lessons was encouraging my students to interact with the key concepts of the lesson. During student interviews, even the students recognized that the artwork was making them "think about" the content of the lesson. For example, after completing the "Antebellum South Lesson" in which the students represented a part of the story Now Let Me Fly by creating a pastel illustration, one student commented, "*Drawing the illustrations really made me think about the story. I had to think about what piece of my part I wanted to draw and what was going on and what part of the day it was.*" When creating this lesson, I wanted a creative and artistic way for the students to explore the emotional text of the story Now Let Me Fly (a copy of the story is included with the lesson plan in Appendix B). I wanted the art-related activity to encourage students to further explore the meanings and emotions associated with the story. The illustrations the students created asked them

to look at the reading more in depth and create their own representations without seeing how the author had chosen to represent the story. The students had to ask themselves: “What is really happening? What emotions are associated with the scene?”

Similarly, after the “Underground Railroad” lesson in which the students made realistic maps and replicas of stations, a student I interviewed responded, *“I learned a lot from the art because you had to think about what it was like back then and how people lived. You had to make it real. The map makes you think about it because you had to pick a real path and then draw it and plan it. You had to think about what you were drawing and how you are going to get to Canada to be free.”*

Another student explained how the activities encouraged him to think about the lesson by stating, *“I really liked making the house and creating a safe place in the house. Making the map and house was neat because it really made me pretend that I was a slave escaping and I had to think about which way to go, and what place to hide in. I like learning this way because it is a lot more fun. It will help me remember it.”*

According to the second post-survey I administered, eleven out of seventeen students chose the Underground Railroad lesson as their favorite and 50% of students said they learned the most from this lesson. All students that chose this lesson wrote that their learning could be credited to the art activities. One student that lacks motivation and has difficulty finishing work wrote in the survey, *“It was the hands-on approach. I really like doing this kind of stuff. When you write papers, you forget because it was boring, but with the Underground Railroad, I got to do a lot and be creative. I remember when I really have to think about things like in that lesson.”*

In addition, I discovered that art could be used to encourage students to engage in other activities, such as writing. I have several reluctant writers in my class, some that receive support for writing. Despite this, my plans were to integrate writing experiences into the Social Studies lessons in which the students were to pretend to be someone else (ex. Slave or factory worker). In order to further motivate students to write I had the each student create a history journal from a sheet of 18x12 construction paper. The students were very excited and engaged when constructing and decorating the journals (See sweep form data in Appendix D). This enthusiasm carried over into their journal writing because they were writing in something that they had created and designed rather than something that had simply been handed to them (See Appendix F for journal entry samples).

Evidence from Literature to Support Claim:

In the book Renaissance in the Classroom (2001), the authors discuss how the integration of arts deepens instruction. One occasion when this happens is when students experience and engage with a text. Drama and visual art experiences help the students to visualize the characters, the setting, and conflicts in the literature they are reading. The authors claim how this helps to engage the students in the world of the story and how readings can be made visible, could be talked about, critiqued, manipulated and revised. Drama and visual arts provide students' access to the text, allows students to create an ownership over the process, and is a means for students to learn from their reading. When I designed the lessons involving the book Now Let Me Fly, I integrated the arts in order to achieve the results mentioned above. I had the students visually represent the story by creating illustrations based on the text. The results I discovered parallel those mentioned by the authors in Renaissance in the Classroom. In addition, the authors recognize how art encourages students to think metaphorically about what they are learning:

Instruction deepens when the arts are present, because art images help children to think metaphorically. The arts seem to deepen instruction because they invite intellectual depth (2001, p. 17).

Claim 3: Students are highly engaged in lessons when they are provided the opportunity to demonstrate creativity and/or personal representation through art or role-play. It was clear that students were more interested in the lesson and more motivated to engage in the activities when the lesson was driven or supplemented by some form of art. This was particularly visible when the students were allowed more autonomy in their artwork. The opportunity to be creative and to add their own touch allowed them to make the artwork theirs, which lead to greater engagement and motivation.

When designing the lessons for my inquiry project, I wanted to engage the students in the activities by allowing them a good amount of flexibility to be creative and to have autonomy when representing what they have learned. For example in the "Bobbin Girl" lesson, I allowed the students to create their own endings to the story and allowed them to design an illustration to represent their story ending. This was intended to engage the students in the story by allowing them to predict through art and writing.

Evidence from Active Research to Support Claim:

The overall engagement of my class throughout such lessons (that involved autonomy and self-representation) is very clear in the Sweep Forms that my mentor teacher and I filled out during my lessons (See Appendix D). The students were very engaged during the artistic aspects of the lessons, particularly when self-representation was allowed. By comparing the sweep forms of the lessons without art integration and the lessons with art integration, it is clear that the students were more engaged in the art lessons overall. In addition to the sweep forms, during interviews the students discussed how they had appreciated and enjoyed the ability to be creative when they were involved with art during the lessons. After the “Bobbin Girl” lesson, some students commented:

“I guess that I liked making up the ending to the story because you could be creative, even though it wasn’t made up right. I had to think about the story. I liked working on the advertisements that we made. I guess that I like to be really creative with the kind of stuff. I liked thinking about how I could make people see that children working in factories is bad.”

“It really made me think about it, but it was also nice because there was not right answer and you could write anything that you thought and nobody could come up and say, “You’re wrong!” It was your own idea. I didn’t have any trouble paying attention during the lesson.”

“I just really liked the activities we did. I like doing things like that and thinking about those kinds of things. I like writing stories and being creative.”

It is clear from these responses that the students find it easier to be focused and engaged when the lesson allows them to make choices, be creative, and/or practice self-representation. In Post-Survey 2, I received similar responses when students described which lesson was their favorite. Eleven of seventeen students chose the “Underground Railroad” lesson as their favorite. Four of the other students chose the “Antebellum South Lesson.” All sixteen students made this choice because of the activity and room for creativity. Some of the reasons provided by the students in the second survey included:

Because we could be creative.

I liked it the most because it was fun to create a map and house and secret hiding place.

Because it was more fun and we got to be more involved and creative.

Responses were similar from all students when answering this question. I feel that I have ample evidence to demonstrate that autonomy in artwork is an effective way to increase student involvement and engagement. By allowing creativity and choice, students play an active role in their learning. This type of learning emphasizes problem solving as students think and make decisions about their art.

Evidence from Literature to Support Claim:

While conducting my inquiry plan, I felt that the arts were very engaging for students because they allowed the students to represent their thoughts and emotions. The following excerpt from Renaissance in the Classroom clearly supports my claim:

The arts are an important medium for learners to discover, develop, and articulate their own understandings of the world and to invent their own versions of and visions for the future (2001, p. 19).

The authors support my claim, by describing how the arts engage students by allowing students to be creative while learning new information. Art is not simply a method to involve students in hands-on learning. Art is an effective teaching tool to encourage problem solving and interaction with the content.

Claim 4: The most highly effective and beneficial form of the arts integrated into my students' learning experiences was role-play and pretending. Through the art of role-play, my students were able to recall more information and they were more engaged than in other lessons implemented during my inquiry project. I provided students with several opportunities to role-play and pretend during the Social Studies lessons that I created for my inquiry project. The students role-played as factory workers and pretended to be slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad when creating their art projects. I used these role-playing experiences to spark discussions and journal writings throughout my inquiry.

Evidence from Active Research to Support Claim:

The strongest piece of evidence for this claim came from the data I collected from the “Factory Simulation.” After having the students role-play a scenario in which they were factory workers in the 1800’s, I asked students during interviews how much they learned and why. The

responses clearly demonstrated that the students' learning could be credited to the art of role-play. One student commented, *"I liked this activity a lot better because it was interactive for me, and you could really feel or you really understood how the people are feeling when they were working in the factories in real life even though we only did it for a short period of time. . . another thing that I think made it teach us more is that it showed us totally from their point of view. So we would know what it would be like."* I received similar responses from most of the students.

A few weeks later I administered the first post-survey in which I asked the students to describe what they remembered from this lesson. Sixteen out of nineteen students provided clear and accurate responses (two had been absent and one did not respond). This was a much higher rate than the other lessons I had implemented during my project. In addition, I asked the students to choose the lesson they learned the most from. Over 50% of the students chose the "Factory Simulation" lesson and they all credited their learning to the interactive aspect of the lesson. For example, some students wrote:

"Because we were acting it out and experience helps you learn more than just learning the facts."

"Because we were mostly interacting. That made it easier to remember and to understand."

"Because you were able to experience how the people were treated and it was fun. You learned and had fun!"

Student work was very compelling evidence for this claim, as well. After I ended the simulation, students used the cards that they made in the factories to write their journals in. This was an idea offered to me by a fifth grade teacher on my team. The responses were descriptive, realistic, and emotional. I received very thorough and descriptive entries from all students, including students who receive support for their writing (**Appendix F**). An average achieving student in my class wrote,

"Today I had my first day of working in a factory. I got very nervous when the inspector threw away my first card. We have very bad working conditions and it is very cold. But I must keep this job to feed my starving family. I get paid 85 cents a week (child labor). Sometimes I have a lot of pressure on me when I have lots of cards to do. That is how it is in a factory."

The responses during interviews and surveys from the other lessons were not as strong or convincing.

The students claimed that they liked this lesson the most, as well. In the same post-survey,

fifteen out of seventeen students chose the “Factory Simulation” as the lesson they liked the most. Reasons for liking the lesson were similar across the board. Students stated that this was their favorite lesson because they either enjoyed the interactive aspect of the lesson, or that it was simply “fun” acting as factory workers. Some responses included:

“I liked it because we got to pretend that we were working in a factory, even if it was cold!”

“I liked pretending to be in a factory because it was fun to pretend and I learned how it was.”

“Because I learned what it was like to be in a factory because I actually had a part like a worker did.”

These pieces of evidence clearly demonstrate that the art of role-play was a powerful learning experience for my students, both emotionally and academically. With a physical, emotional, and personal experience to link their knowledge to, the students were very capable of recalling the lesson and what they learned from the lesson.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Implication for My Future Practice as a Teacher . . .

Through my inquiry project, I have discovered that art is a powerful tool to be used in the classroom to improve engagement and motivation, as well as, to increase the long-term acquisition of content. I am excited that I have made this discovery since I have always been interested in the arts and integrating art into my teaching strategies. Therefore, the results of this project will play a large role in my future practice as a teacher. Although my inquiry project involved a class of fifth grade students, I will apply what I have learned about the arts and learning with any age of students. No matter the age, art is a tangible way for students to learn and to demonstrate their understandings.

I intend on incorporating artwork in a variety of ways in my future teaching practices. I will continue to use art as a form of self-representation for my students. Like writing, art is a powerful medium for students to demonstrate their thoughts and feelings. In order to offer my students a variety of strategies for sharing their thoughts and emotions, I will encourage students to use art, as well as, writing.

I am very enthusiastic about incorporating more opportunities for role-play in my lessons. I have noticed that role-play engages children at various levels. For one, they having a very clear and vivid personal experience, and if implemented right, one that is very dramatic and emotional. After the role-play, it is easier and more natural for students to discuss their emotions and thoughts during the role-play, than if they are describing their feelings while writing or creating artwork. I have seen that the art of role-play leads to strong and compelling discussions. As my year interning comes to an end, I will continue to look for opportunities to incorporate role-play into my lessons. This is a teaching strategy that I will continue to incorporate throughout the rest of my career.

New Wonderings That I Have Developed . . .

Now that I have ended this part of my inquiry into the arts, I feel that evidence I gathered is beginning to demonstrate a clear pattern. The students clearly remembered more from the lessons that involved artwork, rather than the lessons that involved alternative activities. However, I also began to notice a trend among the lessons designed for this inquiry project and lessons I have already taught in my student teaching experience. The students appear to be more engaged and

motivated to learn and work when they are “pretending” or role-playing. This was evident in the Oregon Trail simulation that we did prior to my inquiry project, as well as, during a simulation concerning pollution. My mentor teacher and I both noticed how the students discussed their decisions along the Oregon Trail as if they were real-life situations. The group of fifth grade students I am teaching this year really pretend to be other people in the time and space that we are studying. They become truly engaged in the lesson and fully project themselves into the role they are portraying. This pattern makes me wonder if the element of pretending plays an influential role in the students’ learning and motivation.

In order to take this inquiry further, my new wondering would be to explore the relationship between pretending or play and learning. What role does “play” have in a students’ learning? Are students more engaged and interested when they are able to “pretend”? How often should play or pretend be incorporated into daily lessons? Can they be encouraged too much?

I have many more questions about the role of play and pretending in students’ learning, particularly in association with writing. Each time I had my students write journal entries during my inquiry project, I had them pretend to be someone else. I had them pretend to be people in the early 1800’s, such as, workers in factories, slaves, and pioneers on the wagon trail. I even had them write from the perspective of a bird! Would they rather be free or caged? I noticed that the writing was much richer than writing I had received from other lessons that did not involve pretending. Therefore, I would like to discover the relationship between pretending, the act of writing, the quality of writing, and the motivation to write.

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