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ARTIST/TEACHER: TOWARD A MORE CREATIVE CURRICULUM

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ARTIST/TEACHER: TOWARD A MORE CREATIVE CURRICULUM

by

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ARTIST/TEACHER: TOWARD A MORE CREATIVE CURRICULUM

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This thesis investigates the formation of my teaching identity. It seeks language for why I orient my teaching toward artistic thinking in my preparation and content. Features of artistic thinking discussed include students have personal interests, teachers need to expose and build on what students bring to class, artistic thinking is not linear and creativity invites the unexpected, play and creativity require both time and space and are best accomplished through situated freedom, process ought not be separated from product, making process visible and valuing process will make a positive difference in a student's future. Vignettes from my teaching experiences as an art teacher in an elementary school are used to characterize artistic thinking further through each of these features.

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Artist/Teacher: Toward a more creative curriculum

Introduction

I am a visual artist and educator. As an artist my art-making teaches me to attend to process. What an artist starts with is transformed; materials and self are always in the making. Dewey (1934) would have described this transformation as an “undergoing” occurring through the process of creating and expressing ideas. Materials, techniques, ideas, and the artist all “undergo” change during the artistic process (1934, p. 246). In my artistic process, I begin with a thought or an impulse that is a reaction to something like an object, a musical performance, an emotion, or a moment. Decisions are made as to how to explore it, convey it, discard it, interpret it, or play with it. If these mental activities lead to actions like drawing or painting then every choice causes a new situation to be played with, mulled over, or embellished. The artistic process has begun in earnest. Each color added, brushstroke laid in, tints, shades, textures, objects, impressions made, can cause revelation. These revelations often make it improbable that I will arrive at my original mental image. The thought or reaction that spurred participatory action is derived from the influence of every choice made and enacted. But, my teaching practices do not necessarily orient in these ways. My goal setting lacks the richness of the participatory act and the developing relationships of each part. Often a written lesson plan is like this, lacking the contributions of students, contexts, subject-matter, and content. As an educator my art-making practices reveal how curriculum-making could be

co-created with my students, and this I suggest is the preferable way forward for teachers and students.

As a new art teacher I was given a curriculum to teach. It was well thought out and represented the power of Art to connect students to the world and its traditions, celebrations, cultures, current events, myths, birth and death, nature, etc. As I enacted this curriculum, as good as it was, it felt hollow. It lacked something special. The students that already liked art continued to like art and those that did not continued to not like art. Best practices would seek some motivator to reach these uninterested students. After working through my rookie years, continuing my artistic practice, reading widely, especially from thinkers such as Dewey, Eisner, Malaguzzi, and May, among others, I have come to understand students and teachers need a stake in what they are doing. Sharing the power to determine one's future, and recognizing that basic human desire for autonomy (Pink, 2009). Simple questions like, "What would you like to learn about?" "What do you care about?" or "Is there a material you'd like to use?" have led to amazing conversations, brainstorming sessions, and learning experiences that students will not and do not forget. As students open up to the questions, I get to know them; their cares, interests, and dreams. I can then guide them to a destination that is richer, fuller than the one they are at now. In this way, processes and ways of knowing employed by artists are accessible to even the most reluctant and self-critical student.

Grounded in the ideas expressed by Eisner (2004), education needs to pursue what students aspire to, not what we think they should. Society will not be benefited by a homogenous group of youngsters being dumped into the world. Eisner suggested in 2004 that all students become like artists. This follows in Dewey's (1934; 1938) philosophy

that education is experientially constructed. Further, that education is best when the interests of the students are considered and used to achieve excellence in education. Rather than having students measuring up to the standard in prescribed subjects, guide students to the subjects in which they will succeed based on their personal drive. Then, we can have “artists” leaving high school already highly engaged in a pursuit of their choosing. Dewey (1934) states, “It belongs to the very character of a creative mind to reach out and seize any material that stirs it so that the value of that material may be pressed out and become the matter of a new experience” (p.189). It behooves educators to not prepare the next wave of workers, but a creative citizenry that can think on its feet and pursue goals (common, social, economic, artistic, etc.) thoughtfully. But, the question then arises of how could a new experience be “pressed out” if a space is not provided for that? What if time is not allowed to be stirred and complete the pressing? May (1991) writes wonderfully about lingering. She characterizes lingering as making room for self and reflecting on our relations to the world and what it means to be in it. Lingering might involve direct encounters with various forms of artistic expressions. Not only do students need a time and space to linger, so do teachers. These extended times can allow for improvisation, discovery of the unexpected, and a deepening of new experiences with connections across subjects, disciplines, and past self. As I searched for models that embraced the ideas from Dewey, Eisner, and May I found Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia Approach. The Italian-based approach, aimed at birth to Pre-K children, relies heavily on student interest, dialoging, documentation, and collaboration, paired with real experiences in actual contexts (Kinney, Wharton, 2008). In reading about schools in America and Scotland implementing Malaguzzi’s approach, I concluded

it was possible to develop these uncertain, open-ended teaching environments that relied on student involvement. So, I began to think more concretely about the necessary conditions toward a more creative curriculum for my students and myself.

A basic question given to me in my methods class as a pre-service teacher that has stayed with me over the years is, “What is the point of art education?” The follow up answer is, “to train students in the arts.” Ok, great, but how many kids will become artists in any given graduating class? Is it two or three out of 300? Maybe more, maybe less? Regardless, it is not as many as we assume per the ways we approach art in public education. Our methods, at least where I have taught or been taught, seem focused on all students becoming studio artists. The emphasis is on method, technique, and skill within a given medium. Given the more likely trajectory of many of our students in the arts can we spend time focusing on this outcome. I say, “No.” Then what? Decorating refrigerator doors? Again, the answer is, “No.” Thinking is the answer, specifically thinking and behaving like an artist. Again, I may be splitting hairs here, but this, I believe, is where our efforts will get our students the greatest gains. The process of thinking through a problem or a medium like an artist, and to engage within the critical decision-making en-route as an artist, will benefit our students, no matter the directions their lives take. I am committed to the ideals of discovery, play, lingering, and fostering curiosity. I am committed to what the Arts can teach the non-artist. It is the intersections of myself as artist and educator that are forming my teaching identity. My thesis investigates the formation of this teaching identity seeking language for why I orient my teaching toward artistic thinking. I have come to see primary features of artistic thinking to include:

- Students have personal interests
- Teachers need to expose and build on what students bring to class.
- Artistic thinking is not linear and creativity invites the unexpected.
- Play and creativity require both time and space and are best accomplished through situated freedom.
- Process ought not be separated from product: Reframing assessment
- Making process visible and valuing process will make a positive difference in a student's future.

I turn to vignettes from my teaching experiences as an art teacher in an elementary school to characterize artistic thinking further through each of these features.

Features of Artistic Thinking:

1. Students have personal interests:

Vignette

It's a Tuesday afternoon and the first grade has just finished their latest art project. The art is being hung proudly outside the door to the artroom for the whole school to see. The students fidget and chat as the last classmate returns from hanging her piece. I clear my throat to get their attention and ask a simple question, "What would you like to learn about next?" Surprisingly, or maybe I should not have been surprised, nobody offered up anything. I prod playfully, "Do you already know everything? Isn't there something you are curious about, something you want to know more about?" Still no one raises a hand. The class is perhaps the quietest it has ever been. I offer, "What

about cats? Does anybody want to know more about cats?” A hand timidly goes up. “Ok, what about dogs? Anyone?” More hands go up this time. Before I can ask another question, Bobby raises his hand, I call on him, and he meekly offers, “Space?” “Yes! Space is great and so interesting!” I rush to my whiteboard and write the word “SPACE” very large. Suddenly many hands are up: shapes, cars, faces, dinosaurs, kittens, puppies, tigers, butterflies, kites, and on and on. I cannot keep up with the speed of their ideas. The whiteboard is now filled with subjects to explore. Via a series of ‘what then’ questions the class takes all the ideas and chooses to create a version of a Chinese kite that hangs in the art room decorated with imagery taken from the suggestions they all expressed. It is my first experience co-creating a lesson with students. Later as I helped at the crosswalk, Bobby comes running toward me leaping in the air and shouting, “Art was the best ever today!” It struck me. We had made nothing material today. We had hung art and then had a big discussion. (The result of which was the most satisfying lessons I have ever been a part.)

Discussion

The approach described in the vignette has worked well a couple of times. Both instances have been in 1st grade classrooms. To broaden it out, I have made a few changes. Rather than pose the question only, I also provide a material. This acts as a springboard. I ask, “What could you do with this?” “What would you make?” “What ideas interest you?” “How would you know when you are done?” “How would you know it is good?” “What would good look like for your idea?” When done this it acts as proof of Dewey’s (1934) statement, “It belongs to the very character of a creative mind to reach out and seize any material that stirs it so that the value of that material may be

pressed out and become the matter of a new experience” (p.189). Students enter my teaching space as novice learners, but full of ideas. They are limited in their abilities to express themselves and their ideas. Their visual vocabulary is limited, underdeveloped as well. This does not mean their own ideas are poor starting points. In fact, student prior knowledge is the first scaffold in teaching and we need to uncover it, acknowledge it, and validate it. This creates buy-in and intrinsic motivation.

The etymological origins of interest draw attention to the middle, positioning students to delve into subject-matter, putting them in-between self and other. Biesta (2004) suggests this in-between space is the locus of education and that without it there can be no education, or at least no theory of education. All the more, Biesta established that education is more accurately a form of communication through cultural practice. Ideas are sent out and received by students, but a transformation occurs as each student interprets what the teacher is presenting. Individuals gain an independent view of the idea based in their experiences and cultural knowledge. The personal history of each student is brought to bear upon the learning and shapes it. The space between the teacher’s expressed output and student’s receipt allows for change and assimilation of the new concept. This “gap” is needed and unavoidable. It creates risk in educating (miseducating). As we will see this “gap” allows students to come “into presence”- these individual singular beings reveal themselves by being invited to share and collaborate in the process learning (Biesta, 2004) and leads to the next feature of artistic thinking in education.

2. Teachers need to expose and build on what students bring to class:

Vignette

Heather is a quiet fourth grader. In class she works diligently and generally silently. As a third grader she had made a drawing of an apple tree and the equipment used to pick apples. This seemed unusual for a girl I considered very urban. A year later as the fourth grade began and we were again drawing, she was in the midst of playing with ideas for her drawing. Again, she made some images of apple trees and the tools needed for picking them. Part of our class process is students tell me what they are interested in and we search out images from books, the Internet, or other sources. Here though was a girl that did an excellent job working from her head. Making the connection that this was a recurring image I began to ask her about the apple tree. With no effort on my part, other than seeing the familiar imagery from a year ago, she told me the story of a neighbor man that had apple trees in his yard. Heather and her sisters were always welcome to get some from the trees. Heather went on to talk about the smells and tastes of those right-off-the-tree apples. She had an experience so indelible that it remains one of the happiest images she creates.

Discussion

John Dewey (1934) talks about the notion of medium in *Art As Experience*. He notes that medium signifies an intermediary (p.197). Dewey, May, and Biesta enable us to understand and transfer medium moving from a purely artistic meaning to one that is educational as well. Biesta's gap (2004) we have already established as a middle ground in between student and teacher. May adds to this curriculum as medium (1993). Medium is how an artist transmits desired expressions. Curriculum is how a teacher

transmits desired content, yet in both cases there is a gap that allows for interpretation, understanding or misunderstanding. When I create a work of art or curriculum doing and undergoing are processes entailed. Experiences are the raw material of artistic expression. We all have experience but what does it mean to a student when their personal (as opposed to school experiences) experience has value in an educational context? Shouldn't they be more likely to build upon and expand these experiences previously known? Students that have their lives discovered and incorporated into their learning assimilate new learning with past experiences, and will make lasting connections with the new experiences they are having. What do students bring to class? They bring their physical persons, a certain mental capacity, illness, fatigue, and emotions (sadness, happiness, fear, joy, excitement, doubt, etc.). Also, they bring their personal histories, family histories, ethnic backgrounds, home cultures, and community cultures. They each have complex identities at various stages of formation, stabilities and instabilities, changing views of the world around them that are forever being refined, defined, and repositioned. Grumet's (1993) concept of naming explains richly how teachers encounter what students bring to class as they work out their identities or names (per Grumet). Names are labels like reader, athlete, or artist. She also explains the idea of the unexpected or improvised in teaching as a necessary part of the act of teaching. I cannot know all that a student brings with them so I must be prepared for these unexpected events or at least not be shocked when our curriculum is diverted and subverted by a student's interpretation. Rather, I should capitalize on such events, as these diversions are the students' attempts at sense-making. They are attempting to reconcile what they know or have experienced with what I present. How do these parts fit together? Teachers

work in the middle ground, i.e. school, between home and adult existence (Grumet, 1993). She further articulates well the interactions and interdependencies of artist, subject, and medium as it relates to teacher, student, and curriculum. These concepts then point back to Dewey's (1934) doing and undergoing as described in *Art as Experience*. These prior experiences are what students scaffold new knowledge atop. It is incumbent to expose those parts of students and utilize them to customize or improvise better interactions between content and the students lived experiences.

3. Artistic thinking is not linear and creativity invites the unexpected:

Vignette

The tables in the art room have been rearranged to be one long table approximately 24 feet long. A single sheet of banner paper runs the length of the table. The fourth grade students are excited as they enter. The room has not been set like this before. We are going to play with watercolor paint. A minimum of instruction is given about care and use of the medium today. Some of the instruction is a quick overview/review of watercolor techniques; wet into dry, wet into wet, wax resist, salt, and dry brush. Then students play and interact with the paint and each other. Standing side by side around the table conversations emerge and develop. I am asked questions. "How do you make gray? How do you dry-brush?" "What are the colors in a rainbow?" Sometimes peers answer before I can. Discoveries are exclaimed, "I made grass!" "Did you see my monster?" "I mixed red and blue and made a new color I've never seen!" "The water in my cup looks like blood!" "I mixed all the colors and made mud!" "Check out my wet into wet. It looks like fireworks."

Discussion

Play is certainly a more appropriate way to view our attempts at creativity, ingenuity, and originality as we discover pathways to artistry, artistic thinking, artistic habits, and the skills that induce a more aesthetically pleasing life. Art is life lived sensually and more fully known mentally, spiritually, and physically. As I have learned about Art more and more I have come to appreciate the unanticipated. As a teacher, the unanticipated was something difficult with which to deal. These errant interpretations of a concept are not acceptable. They don't fit into the timeline for the curriculum. Teachers seem to be forever searching for the silver bullet to assessment and timesaving to accomplish more and more. The current federal system with its pressure on high stakes testing has made this even more apparent. My regular education colleagues are in a hurry to teach what will be tested and they adopt a very linear delivery of their content. Likewise art educators adopt similar practices in an effort to be comparable or to help explain their importance. "See we have steps, we have a linear process with benchmarks, we have data." I disagree with this approach. Art education needs to be other than regular education because it is so very different and so very encompassing of life. Students need a place to slow down and take time to experiment and think. They need practice not arriving at the expected destination. They need better preparation for the lives they will lead and a linear art education does not help. They get enough of this in regular education. Art needs to be artful.

When I was attending college studying what it was to be an artist I never learned what that really meant, to be an artist. My head was too full of my own ideas and biases to do any real learning or discovering. I was my biggest impediment to learning. I did

not have an open mind because I errantly felt I had it all figured out. But adding to that education, life experience, children, a teaching certificate, and teaching experiences I have come to see Art in its wholeness. It is not painting alone, as I naively believed long ago. I now feel there is no artform superior to another (we are allowed our preferences, just not prejudices). In seeing the more complete picture of Art, I have discovered errors in how I approached it's teaching, too. As I began teaching I was given a model of creativity based on how an artist works:

- a. Ask a question/pose a problem...
- b. Then do some research?
- c. Think about it...
- d. Find solution...
- e. Test it...

This is a fine model, if you realize its not meant to be linear. However, it is overly interpreted or implemented in linear fashion. Teachers give problems, students do research and sketches, some method is used to choose the best sketch, and the sketch is translated into whatever media has been selected by the teacher. The teacher judges the artwork somehow and the cycle begins again. I understand the process is made linear for ease of assessment. It is made linear to make it understandable or more teachable. It is made linear to simplify the life of the teacher. This simplification does a disservice to Art and more importantly our students. The simplification eliminates the possible richness of experience a student may have if Art were taught more truthfully, more completely.

I propose we allow for the whole, interactive richness of creativity to enter the classroom and do away with these linear presentations. If we utilize a concept of play that encompasses creating, planning, and reflecting we can begin to get at a more complete and accessible mode for being artists. Dewey, in *How We Think* (1910), describes being playful and serious at the same time. Intellectual curiosity and flexibility and interest in the development of subject-matter of its own accord so that every conclusion can be put to further use (pp. 218-219). Our students in the arts can tap into a more natural way, playful way of doing things and have greater autonomy (Pink, 2009). Students could handle more complex ways of doing things than we know or expect. We don't need to be lowering any bar; instead we need to raise it (VanSledright, 2002). How is this done though? What approaches for educating this way already exist? How do we assess an internal process like being creative or thinking? Looking to the vignette, a student behaving like an artist in community is clearly possible. Staging the classroom or studio space to be collaborative and open allows for more authentic interactions like when students answered questions before I could. Setting the objective to be play, or discovery, with limited guiding from myself students enjoyed the learning and these experiences are the ones my students have begun to refer back to a year later. Since beginning these more open sessions I have heard the phrase, "Remember when you taught us...?" These comments are being said in reference to new ideas, new works of art, a year or more later.

4. Play and creativity require both time and space and are best accomplished through situated freedom:

Vignette

Fifth grade students have entered and are ready to start their first hour of the day in art. The necessities of attendance, Pledge of Allegiance, and settling in are over. I begin the hour's instruction. "There is one goal for class today. We will not begin any final projects. Please do not commit to any one idea yet. Take your time and explore the possibilities. At the front of the room are all the supplies for drawing we have discussed and played with in the last class. Today you have the time to think and play with what you want to draw. If you need help finding a resource or tool, I am here to help." Students move to get supplies. Other students ask for clarification, "What am I supposed to do?" "Is this going to be graded?" "I don't get it." I pull together a group of the confused. I demonstrate how I begin with some idea, peace. I attempt a composition. Next, I consider other possible ways of arranging flowers on a paper to create a peace sign, quickly sketching out another three versions. I ask the students if I could have done any of differently. Those that were satisfied with my example move away. A few remain. Next, I try a mostly verbal approach. "Just keep your options open. I know you have ideas about what you want to do, but is that first idea the only way to do it? What would you need to better understand your idea and its parts? Would an image be helpful, a book about it, some Internet research, or could I get the actual thing for you?" These last few move away to begin, but two remain asking for additional resources. Other students see these students getting images and they come up to ask for additional resources as well. Students are working, talking, getting up to get supplies needed. I am

now left to move around refocusing students away from overly social conversations that don't deal with our work at hand. Two students correct me. What looked overly social was actually an animated conversation about the "right way" to draw Naruto, a popular ninja manga/anime character. They were on task, and passionate. I suggest they might both be right, and move on. Other students continue to struggle with going beyond their initial ideas, and what is meant by different versions. These students try to find completely new subjects to be the next version, rather than trying to present their original idea they are exploring differently. Still others jump from subject to subject because they can and haven't yet found the subject that holds their attention.

Discussion

We want impulse to be a starting point, but we want to delve beyond that to critical thinking, evaluating the possibilities, all while remaining open to impulse. This is one way to define play: open yet seeking structure and understanding. The constraints of our everyday assessment driven days tend to prevent access to a critical portion of theories of creativity namely, time. The tightly structured day flies in the face of discoveries mentioned by Daniel Pink and best ways to get people to innovate (Pink, 2009). He points out that people were being most ingenious off the clock doing work they felt was important, allowed them autonomy, and had purpose beyond themselves or a transcendent purpose. In a TED talk (2009), Pink describes an Australian company that once a year provides a 24-hour, caffeine fueled, free work period where employees may work on whatever they want with whomever they want, but that the company is allowed to sift through and select ideas to develop. Some if not most of that company's best innovations come from these highly independent periods. How is it then that we offer

schooling that is devoid of these essential ingredients? How can a student persist if they have only been hurried along? How can an individual solve problems on their own if they have never had the time to stew? Meditate? Noodle around? Play with a problem? Art could provide a wonderful antidote to this “on the clock” mentality. Products and processes can have more emphasis placed upon them in a student’s own experience through situated freedom, open-ended curriculums (Although, experience has shown a predisposition to stalling out without some prodding by a mentor or mature learner to coach/coax the student). Experience has taught me that students can invest themselves over longer periods than typically allowed in classrooms. There is a definite risk of unlimited expansion of time frames for play. Students don’t always have an internal drive for some felt completion. It may be that they lack sufficient self-regulation to push them through a problem. More often I witness students working to exhaustion and unfinished results. Keeping this in mind, play needs to feel unbounded for the student, yet be structured for the teacher as the teacher aids students in advancing their ideas, research, playing, etc. Dewey (1934) states “As experience matures, activities are more and more regulated by the end to be attained; purpose becomes a thread that runs through a succession of acts...as the need for order is recognized, play becomes a game; it has rules” (p. 278). We playfully develop orderings and identify our impulses. Now, recall Parker Palmer’s paradoxes (1998), one of which is a space that is bounded and open (p. 74). He describes it this way:

“If boundaries remind us that our journey has a destination, openness reminds us that there are many ways to reach that end. Deeper still, the openness of a learning space reminds us that the destination we plotted at the outset of the journey may not be the one we will reach, that we must stay alert for clues to our true destination as we travel together.” (pp. 74-75)

Parker defines the situated freedom possible through art and art education well. His paradoxical bounded-openness is exactly what occurs each time I step to the canvas brush in hand, begin a class, or a student is given blank paper and a pencil. This balance between the two extremes is worth exposing students to so that they may develop self-regulation, understandings about experience, qualities of work that make it appear more or less complete, how to recognize fatigue in process, and the pitfalls of unbridled openness. Without this openness there is no room to play and develop. When Dewey (1934) wrote about openness he included open spaces of both time and space. “Lack of room is denial of life, and openness is affirmation of its potentiality...We need a “space of time” in which to accomplish anything significant” (p.209). This is the art room as I conceive it. A time, a place, open-ended, ready for play, yet bounded so that time and space do not swallow up the experiences. Order is meted out as dictated by the individual progress of each student. Novice learners are provided opportunities to grow in unexpected ways as any painting would.

5. Process ought not be separated from product: Reframing assessment

Vignette

On a PLC (Professional Learning Community) day and I had gone to meet with three other art teachers. We are fortunate to meet and since we don't have students in common we choose to focus our discussions on what and how we teach. During this particular meeting our focus had become what types of students we have and how best to assess them. A continuum was developed that has students that can talk about art, but not

make art skillfully on one end and students that are skillful artists, but cannot explain their art on the other. Our talk brought to mind two very different students...

Jerry had always impressed me with his passion for drawing. I will admit he had a flair for the grotesque, but his drawing evidenced artistic understanding that was beyond his peers' abilities. When he returned to school from a summer vacation with photographs of a wooden trout he had created independently under the tutelage of his grandfather, I knew he needed a mentor. Part of the process to get a mentor was an interview.

On the day of the interview, Jerry entered the boardroom and sat, one leg tucked under him, and looking down towards the table. He glanced up briefly as each member of the committee greeted him. An almost imperceptible "hi" was given after each introduction. I was glad that I was on the committee and Jerry, I think, was glad I was there too. He struggled to find words to explain his process, or he simply did not have them. In his case, the work spoke for him best.

Juanita is from the other end of the continuum. Her artwork is often very rich with meaning, yet rendered unintelligibly. I can remember her as a first grader explaining to the class what each little scribble indicated on her drawing. Without her explanations, though, little would have been understood. I would like to say that her drawings eventually matched her speaking ability, but it did not. Juanita did not develop technically as an artist, but her abilities to perceive meaning, to explore masterpieces and their contents, and to suggest ways forward to classmates shown brightly.

Discussion

Both kinds of students can benefit by being drawn to the middle of this continuum, but if the focus is only the product of their hands, their artwork and growth will be short-changed in their learning. Without a doubt the mental processes of an artist will have a greater impact on the lives of students rather than acquiring techniques to beautify a refrigerator front. Again, we see a counterpoint to the importance placed on results and timeframes. Of course, we desire these outward signs of accomplishment, but as an art educator I realize I will have some students that can make art, that they “just” get it, and I will have others that, try as they might, will always struggle with stick figures. However, both groups should and often can work through the processes of creating like a visual artist. Each one experiencing success through their strengths as they relate to art, art-making, and critique. Each type of student can find lessons looking back reflecting on the process just completed (I say completed here for the sake of making sense of the statement, but I do not believe the process actually ends. Rather, process is continuous), and during the journey to the result. Making process have a greater value than results doesn’t occur in hindsight. I must attend to student choices, impulses as they occur on the journey. Products are artifacts of process. These artifacts are but one way in which a process can be explored and understood. Conversation or writing could be another way of understanding process and our decision-making at the end. Products have value in how they help explain process. For some processes there are expected products, mathematical equations for example. In visual art however there generally are no expected outcomes. This being the case we cannot attend only to the art object, but more on the moment-to-moment decision-making en route.

In the vignette, engaging in observation of both types of students allows me to see the progress through their products. As the class time progresses, as they work, I can ask questions to understand choices acted upon. These types of formative assessment reveal what is hidden within process as students create art. My attention to formative assessments allows glimpses of the “undergoings” as students are “doing” art. (Dewey, 1934) I can discover what is really being attended to. Is it color, the feel of the clay, the inspiration for the work, fear, and a misunderstanding, an alternative interpretation of the lesson, or the unexpected? Are students acting on impulse or a more conscience decision? Eisner (1992) states, "The last thing a modern teacher of the arts in America wants is a class full of standardized performances on a given task." (p. 594) I couldn't agree with this statement more. The beauty and power of art is reduced if art is not allowed to be other than a standardized space. As an art educator I realize, Art's power is in its capacities to develop the individual understandings of a student as they enter the process of art making. Art's power is in allowing a different part of the mind to be given an opportunity to develop (Eisner, 1992).

6. Making process visible and valuing process will make a positive difference in a student's future:

Vignette

The room has become quite loud with the hum of conversation. Having just completed collages, third graders are using laptops to record interviews. Each student has questions to facilitate the interview and they are working in pairs. The stated goal is to reflect on the process of creating they have just gone through. They ask each other

questions about genre selected, artist intent, likes, dislikes, subject matter, and whether they would make any changes. At each point they are encouraged to explain why they made the choices they did, and expand on the answers they have given. As I circulate, there are minimal problems with software and hardware. Some pairs are helping other pairs find the application with which to record. A few groups have to be moved further apart since they are picking up the other interviews. Kylie and Monica have finished Kylie's response. We watch the playback together. The girls have done a fair job of asking and answering the questions. There is some awkwardness, hands in front of their mouths, but engagement too. Near the end Kylie gets asked if she would change anything. Kylie then proceeds to suggest changes for her work: a more detailed background layer, a sun in the sky, and less people. Monica replies that she likes the portraits the way it is and wonders out loud why Kylie would make those changes. Kylie responds that while she likes her artwork too she thinks it could be better. It just didn't feel right, but she was done working on it. Monica seemed to understand and appeared satisfied with Kylie's explanation.

Discussion

Creating a classroom culture of external thinking so that the invisible can become visible (Kinney & Wharton, 2008) will make a positive difference in students' futures. Those viewing the actions of another do not always understand choices made and enacted. Therefore, students are often left to wonder how I arrived at a decision. My mental processes are hidden from them. It has become clear that if a student is to truly learn from me I need to learn more about myself. The choices that have become intuitive through long practice need explaining for the novices in my classes. By valuing the

process I go through and attend to I have improved my ability to teach students about the choices they might make as artists. Then by encouraging them to think and respond to the choices they have made provides a window into their choices and impulses. The interviews demonstrated the novelty they found in asking these kinds of reflective questions as well as the fact that they are not often enough asked to be thoughtful about their actions. Other sense-making efforts like journaling, interviews, critiques, book-making, illustrations, and one-to-one conversations have led to students creating and examining different possibilities later. By examining choices, impulsive or conscience, students have been better able to see the benefits of choice. They are able to better appreciate the unexpected and incorporate the unexpected into whatever it is they have been pursuing. They are better able to employ the “random” to chosen ends. It develops in them greater power in evaluation and better ability to move beyond their first ideas to generate more possibilities, and not closing themselves to future unseen possibilities that emerge in process. However, this is not currently the norm in my classes. It exists in limited cases, yet as peers interact the peer-to-peer modeling will help promote this more generally. As I continue to develop a classroom/studio environment that encourages this I hope to find evidence of students exploring possibilities more often.

Conclusions

The features of artistic thinking as a whole grow confident thinkers that learn through and appreciate differences in my experience. This is a world I want for my students. More specifically, I see that investing in student interests fosters a learning

environment that develops through each person's participation. It is the combining of their interests and the curriculum that can engender a desire to explore freely and openly. If I, as a teacher, can know what students are interested in, then I can more skillfully tailor the curriculum to them. Even better, I can then turn some of the curriculum decisions over to them. The focus on their ideas draws them into the space between teacher and student. They begin to provide some of the content (it might be better stated they discover themselves, for their interests are the added content) that is discovered during art-making and sense-making. It is easier to invite a student to a more challenging experience if I start where they are. There is security for them beginning with the known (an interest of theirs), then seeking an unknown of their choosing (something not yet known but taken from what they are curious about), and followed by careful prods and pokes from me. By involving the student I can better sense the space between us, the differences in our experiences, and better understand what motivates them. It follows that I can then encourage students to go further, ask deeper questions of themselves, to try a technique they aren't familiar with, or view their interests from a new angle. I can start them on an unexpected journey. By accessing their interest I can draw students to the "gap" (Biesta, 2004) and improve my chances of creating positive educative experiences for them today, and ideally many tomorrows.

Building on what students bring, beyond interest, to each learning situation fosters a curriculum that is not only the teachers, but also the students. Constructing and improvising a curriculum that bridges my content and the students lived experiences carries tremendous power. It situates a student within the process of learning in a way that is more personal and felt than a curriculum that does not seek to discover them.

There is a drawing out of a student's personal identity, background, beliefs, community identity, and family identity that can be a tremendous fuel for learning. As Grumet (1993) stated students have these names that label them, that are either self-identified or more often imposed by a teacher or other community member. A curriculum is unfinished until a student has interpreted it. Just as an artwork begins within the artist, and is transmitted into a medium, and deposited into an object. This object now holds the artist's experience of its making. However, the object is transformed again as soon as an audience views it. They provide their own interpretations of what they see. The art object has now been remade according to each audience members' experience. There is no way to predict the result of this transformation. Each individual in the audience completes the transaction differently and personally. Often there is art we cannot relate to because it does not strike a cord within our experience. I can ill afford to miss the mark with my students. I cannot connect them to my content if I do not know them. It is incumbent upon me to individualize as often as possible, while remaining open to each students needs, histories, and the stated goals of the curriculum.

Employing play, reorienting the teaching of creativity to embrace the unexpected promotes a student population that could function like artists in community, at least in the art room. It is possibly an overstatement to say play is a superior way to learn. Play can be a self-regulated way to explore and order our experience (Dewey, 1934, p.278) And, if this ability to self-regulate and order our experiences doesn't exist then play can help them grow. Perhaps more important to my efforts is the idea that play invites the unexpected. As any painter or other artist will attest results are not as expected. As we "do" the process of making we "undergo" many transformations. Brush strokes that we

expected to have on effect, have another. Some nuance unnoticed comes to the foreground in either subject-matter or painted relationships. This ability to adapt and incorporate the unintended, unexpected is of great value in the life of any person. However, as Eisner (1992) points out, “Almost all of the basic skills taught in the primary grades teach children that there is only one correct answer” (p. 594) Further proof of this was observed by VanSledright (2002) when he attempted to “do history” with a set of 5th graders. As he attempted to develop in them the skills of a historian, they repeatedly turned to an encyclopedia to “find the right answer”. This is in line with studies showing a decline in divergent thinking in children as they advance in school (Robinson, 2006). There needs to be a place other than the regular curriculum, or better a replacement of the regular curriculum with something more meaningful, playful, and artful. I believe any content area could benefit from incorporating more play and unexpected experiences.

Situated freedom fosters play and creativity, the going in and going out of ideas, experiences, sensations, perceptions, the push and pull of creative energies. Outside my classroom I cannot say where students will find boundaries. They need time and space to investigate the world. My artroom becomes a space where the boundaries can feel pushed back. Unlike the time-bound pacing guides of the regular education teachers, I can allow a freedom to linger and play (May, 1991).

An emphasis on process and product and their relationship promotes learning that is more complete. Students need to answer why and how questions more often than they get to. These questions aim at what came before the result. Students enter the art room with varying capacities for art making. Pinning the success of a student on abilities that might be underdeveloped compared to a peer’s is antithetical to the development of that

individual. It is a mistake to hold students accountable for a product they cannot produce. This does not mean I won't teach the various techniques, it does mean that I will value the process of making over the products. The products become a touchstone to discovering the thinking, decisions, and impulses that were part of the process of creating. The focus on process as it relates to a product lets me look past the product and assess better the judgments, critical thinking I hope to develop through art-making. A picture created in the 3rd grade will have little impact on the future of any person. By contrast the ability to understand choices, find methods of expression to match needs, embracing the unexpected, or playing with something will aid anyone.

Creating a classroom culture that values and illuminates hidden facets of process will benefit a student's future. As I have striven to foster more open and transparent processing, I believe the levels of discovery have increased for some students individually. My own artistic thinking being narrated and expressed to students allows them insight to my way of processing something. Their process being brought to light through various formative assessments makes them aware of their impulses and conscience decisions. This all helps develop their ability to critically assess good, better, or best. It allows them opportunity to deepen their process and attend to parts of the creative process they didn't realize they were moving past. Perhaps they aren't stopping to consider the effects of their impulses upon their creations, or recognize recurring themes within their expression. If I can put a spotlight on their successes then the student can build even stronger skills. At some point I believe these shared introspections benefit the students as they engage in other highly cognitive activities that are not art-making. These various sense-making approaches can be employed elsewhere.

A Final Word

It is my belief that orienting my teaching toward artistic thinking will be the most beneficial curriculum I can offer my students. These habits or ways of doing, I believe adhere well to the manner in which many artists operate day-to-day. How an artist works on an idea, explores his/her world, expresses their curiosity, seeks understanding, opens themselves to new revelations, experiments with new ways of doing and knowing, and invests in process are universally good ways to live. A person that can take on all or even just some of these habits will live a more fulfilled life I think. When they run into tough situations, or unanticipated opportunities arise they will have had experiences that prepared them to sort through and deal with either. It is a preparation that isn't formulaic, but is more a way of being. It accepts the "undergoing" of experience as a beneficial consequence of doing something. It is embracing life more completely. It is a life well lived as an artful existence.

There has been a felt kinship on my part for these philosophers, theorists, educators, and researchers. Over and over they say things that resonate not only with what I believe is sound reason, but also my experience as an artist. From the beginning of my career as a teacher I have been steadily moving back to my beginnings as an artist, first. Eisner especially stands out with our shared experiences as painters. It isn't hard for me to relate, as I see myself reflected in how he has come to understand education (Eisner, 1992). Don't misinterpret this as grandstanding or self-adulation. I do not mean to imply I am an equal to any of these knowledgeable souls, only like-minded. They have very much accompanied me on my journey toward a creative curriculum and

provided language for me to express my lived understandings of the significances of doing so.

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