ART EDUCATION: A SURVEY OF THE
CURRENT TRENDS AND THEMES
IN K-8 ART CLASSROOMS

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DEDICATIONS

I would like to dedicate this paper to one of my best friends.

She has been rivaling cancer for the past six months and yet her positive attitude still holds strong.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss research found within the realm of Art Education to discover what exactly is being taught under the umbrella of Art Education in classrooms today ranging from kindergarten through eighth grade. The paper is divided into three parts: part one addresses an historical perspective regarding the position of art education in classrooms through the centuries. Part two involves the bulk of my research, including a few interviews with elementary art teachers, in order to uncover the current trends and themes in today’s art classrooms that teachers are following. This part of the paper breaks down themes used within lesson planning in the classroom and presentation of lessons as well as different teaching styles that are common today. Part three analyzes the research uncovered in part two while relating it to personal reflection. The author spent the final semester of her undergraduate career as a student teacher in a K-8 school art classroom. The author uses her own results/writings from personal journals that are reflective of student teaching in order to show how current trends and themes are currently being applied in art classrooms. Part three is a reflective perspective that relates back to the research compiled in Part two of this thesis.
Art Education: A Survey of the Current Trends and Themes in K-8 Art Classrooms

Introduction

“With a subject matter as broad as life itself, the arts easily relate to aspects of almost everything else that is taught,” (Fowler, 2008). Thus is the beauty of having art in the curriculum at all grade levels. Beginning with elementary school and continuing on through middle and high school, students should be exposed to the current trends that are present in art in order to aid in fostering certain social skills, community involvement, as well as how to become visually literate. With art in the curriculum, there is endless potential not only to discover the expansive concepts that it contains, but also in doing so, re-emphasize other core subjects such as reading, writing, and math. Throughout the centuries, art education has gone through many phases and changes, a cycle if you will, such as the cyclical nature of artistic movements. Art education trends often tend to be a reaction against the previous philosophies and coincide with the art movement that is currently taking place. Such movements often overlap or are simultaneously happening. This paper seeks to uncover the current trends and themes in K-8 art classrooms; what is popular, what is working and what is not, etc… and will later bring in the personal student teaching experience of the author. In order to fully understand and scrutinize what is currently taking place within such classrooms, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with a general history of art education, teaching, and the trends and themes that have surrounded the topic in the past and have helped to make it what it is today. Learning about the past will help one to prepare in the present for what one hopes to create/accomplish in the future.
PART I:
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
The Development of Art Education over Time

Many Defining Movements

There have been many major influences on art education in the 19th and 20th centuries such as: Industrialism, Existentialist Theories, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the Progressive movement, the School Art Style, DBAE, Multiculturalism, Interdisciplinary and Issues based Art Education. A more liberal curriculum stemmed from the advent of the American public high school in the early nineteenth century than was previously allowed by the classical academies, thus giving way to the incorporation of art education within the school curriculum. In Boston in 1821, one drawing class was introduced at a common school and one painting class in Philadelphia in 1840 at Central High School. These classes were the first art classes to be introduced to the secondary public school system (Hubbard, 1967). This was a major achievement, although fine art education was not yet well-received by the public.

In the Boston Schools of 1873, there was a particular emphasis on drawing as an aid to developing manual skills. “Drawing continued to be a basic component of the core curriculum throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when educators saw drawing as important in teaching handwork, nature study, geography, and other subjects” (Walling, 1994). By the 1890’s, the “appreciation of the beautiful” was a standard philosophy among a few serious art teachers. In general however, at this point art continued to be viewed as primarily utilitarian. The following stage, known as Existentialism in Art Education meant that the only thing one can express is oneself. Common in the mid to late nineteenth
century, there was an extensive freedom of expression resulting from this philosophy that redirected the studio-oriented curriculum.

Early in the 1900’s it became apparent that children’s drawings done independently of dictated lessons showed little to no interest in abstract or geometrical forms:

In the twentieth century, with the advent of modernism, art education in the United States edged away from a utilitarian philosophy to one of creative expression, or art-making for personal development. Art continued to be valued, although less often as a core subject, during the early decades of the century and then declined in importance with the advent of World War II. In the postwar period, particularly after the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957, core-subject emphasis shifted dramatically to mathematics and science. Art education reached a low point in the 1970s, when a shrinking school-age population (the graduating baby boomer generation) and a serious national energy crisis brought about many school closings and program cuts. Art programs were among the first to be reduced or eliminated (Walling, 1994).

A major influential figure at this time was Arthur Dow, who wrote a text called “Composition” introducing the elements of design (line, color, shape, texture, size, value and form) as well as the principles of design (balance, unity, rhythm, pattern, contrast, emphasis, and movement). Although it was apparent at this time in the early 1900’s that children’s drawings that were done independently of dictated lessons showed very little interest, if any, in abstract or geometrical forms, Dow’s list of elements and principles of design is something that has been taught through the evolution of art education (Dow, 1920).

Another influential figure in art education was John Dewey, who had a philosophy that opposed that of Dow by being interested more in the honest child expression and in a “gradual maturing of art powers than in forced mimicry of adult naturalistic drawing” (need correct citation). Interestingly, Dewey and Dow eventually ended up intertwining their theories with the publication of Dow’s “the Theory and Practice of Teaching Art,” in 1908. The book is a collaboration of a formulated system of aesthetic education and child expression that changed the objectives of general art education in the United States forever. Another important event that had a huge impact on the field of art education was the advent
of the *Applied Arts Book* by Henry Turner Bailey (later to be renamed the *School Arts Magazine*). Within this magazine there included an approved outline for each month of the academic year for all grades. This outline specifically outlined what was to be done and how one should go about doing it. Bailey's hope was that the magazine would help to give teachers ideas and that they would create variations of the lesson, though it was often replicated or reproduced in the exact same fashion (School Arts, 2007). Regardless, the School Arts Magazine was widely used and still continues to be a valuable teacher resource today. Its introduction and usage helped to set the stage for the School Arts Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement, which had really already begun to emerge.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was a reaction to the “industrial ugliness” that plagued London, New York, and Philadelphia as well as other major cities during the Industrial period. Initially developed in England, the movement soon gravitated into the United States with its challenges to the Victorian era and its tastes. It was inspired by the concerns for social reform brought about by such great thinkers as Walter Crane and John Ruskin whose ideals of good design were based on their notions of a good society where workers were not brutalized by the working conditions, such as those commonly upheld in factories. Together with reformer and designer William Morris, the ideals of this new movement were to boycott the factory systems that were becoming such powerful trends and return to the custom-made practices inherent in the Renaissance:

Ruskin, Morris, and others proposed that it would be better for all if individual craftsmanship could be revived-- the worker could then produce beautiful objects that exhibited the result of fine craftsmanship, as opposed to the shoddy products of mass production. Thus the goal was to create design that was: ‘…for the people and by the people, and a source of pleasure to the maker and the user.’ Workers could produce beautiful objects that would enhance the lives of ordinary people, and at the same time provide decent employment for the craftsman (Logan, 1955).
In contrast to the neglected fine art education, the crafts movement was welcomed into the public schools simply because it neither reflected aristocratic art traditions, nor was it vocational (Hubbard, 1967). The Arts and Crafts movement did remain a part of art education for many years to come.

**The 1920’s through the 1990’s**

In the 1920’s and 1930’s came Progressive Education with the philosophies such as that of Maria Montessori. The Montessori School method housed schools in homes or homelike facilities. Children were trained to come in and go out as they might in visiting a family friend and greeting the teacher as if he/she was a hostess (Logan, 1955). Activities at these “schools” included materials such as string, pegs, cardboard, yarn, balls, etc… “The physical messiness was as distasteful to her [Montessori] as the aesthetic value of the children’s work was unrecognized” (Logan, 1955). American schools that followed the Montessori approach tended to liberalize their interpretation of the original European style. There were many extreme forms of children’s freedom of expression found in the 20’s and 30’s in such Progressive schools; however, quite often, teachers in public schools modified activities in a sensible manner and consistently referred to the School Arts Magazine when developing and practicing their curriculum. The Montessori method as well as other previously mentioned philosophies of the early 20th century continued to be utilized throughout the post World War II years and traces of them can still be found in our schools today.

Later introduced into the art field by a woman named Blanche Jefferson was “Dictated Art,” where teachers were said to be using patterns, step-by-step directions, prepared outlines, etc… in order to mimic adult examples. Jefferson also identified the “self-directed” art education practice where the idea was that the teacher was to simply
supply a variety of materials and then remain in the background and strictly be an observer. “Art was not something that children learned to do; it was something they did with neither thought nor direction” (Herberholz and Hanson, 1990). One can identify a fluctuation here that heads back towards Existentialism and away from the Arts and Crafts Movement.

During the 1970’s and 1980’s, the celebration of different cultures was raised as an argument and recommendation for an innovative program in art education that dealt with multiculturalism as a future area of focus in the curricula for school arts. “The major goal of multiculturalism education is to change the total educational environment so that it promotes a respect for a side range of cultural groups and enables all cultural groups to experience equal educational opportunity” (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002). There were a few educators at the time that wanted to focus mainly on art education’s inadequacies and therefore called for multicultural perspectives in both the attitudes toward the learners as well as concepts regarding art.

In part, it was the dichotomizing of fine art and popular art, and the classification of the fine arts as high art, and popular arts as the mundane, banal, simplistic, and not needing programmed tuition that led a number of art educators to question the validity of defining the purposes of art education in terms of cultivating good taste and refining aesthetic perception (Johnson, 1992).

The art education content debate continued throughout the 70’s and 80’s and was centered primarily on the concerns for more broadly based values that would represent the diversity of the cultures that make up the schools. However, there were many practical and conceptual problems with the interest in art educators of the meaning and significance of art in other cultures.

Curricular considerations include questions that center around issues of inclusion and exclusion with respect to content selection, the paradox of historicism with respect to theoretical premises about that content, and the dangers of the new ethnological frameworks which have the potential to oversimplify or misinterpret other cultural arenas (Johnson, 1992).
Around the same time as the multiculturalism phenomenon, there was the rise of the interdisciplinary approach to art education - discipline-based art education (DBAE). “A major shift in art education theory and practice surfaced...when scholars in the field promoted the idea that children can indeed learn from an art world constructed and inhabited by professional art critics, aestheticians, art historians, and artists. Emphasis moved from a focus on the child to a focus on art as a subject for study” (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002). Art was finally considered to be a subject with content that could be taught the way that other subjects were taught in schools, to be looked at as an integral part of the curriculum.

By focusing on works of art, DBAE integrates content from four main art disciplines – aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production. By studying works of art through these disciplines, students develop critical thinking skills and inquiry processes. DBAE is built on a framework that supports the idea that more than art production is necessary for art learning and that art can relate to other subjects in the school curriculum (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002).

This theory/concept was also emphasized by Dwaine Greer, former professor of Art at the University of Arizona and director of The Getty Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts remarks:

In teaching art according to discipline-based principles, everything done is referenced to art. There is content (information, concepts, and techniques) that can be assessed and for which teachers can be accountable. This attention to subject matter answered those critics of art education who maintain that art education has little to do with art. In response, it is easy to point to the knowledge and skills that students are acquiring. When justifications for art education are made in terms of increasing competency rather than enjoyment, school people and parents look at art as a legitimate subject of instruction (Greer, 1984).

DBAE was implemented in elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States in order to act as educational reform for the improvement of arts education in schools. DBAE was considered by some educators to be a positive solution for the problems facing education in general, more specifically art education. However, it was criticized by others who did not believe that the decrease in time spent in the studio in order to strengthen other
art-related areas was necessary or significant. “Art education continues to modify itself in response to these criticisms. Educational reforms such as multiculturalism, feminism, and democracy in education developed alongside DBAE, both challenging and informing its practice” (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002).

Issues-based art education ensured the inclusion of multicultural issues, issues of race, class and gender, as well as other critical issues within our contemporary world. Leading art educators such as June K. McFee and Rogena M. Degge have suggested specific curricular approaches that have consistently advocated the study of the distinctive artistic achievements of other cultures and ethnic groups in the United States and beyond (McFee & Degge, 1977). This view is supported not solely for the purpose of promoting a greater depth of comprehension of art and its diverse forms, yet also for breeding a generally improved sense of intercultural understanding. This purpose had a timely appeal for the 1990’s wherein the art educator who worked within the general liberal education framework would be able to more easily and concurrently teach both the understanding of culture through art as well as the understanding of art through culture (Delacruz, 1992).

There is a new era in art education theory; one which posits a multi-faceted, multi-ethnic view of artistic excellence rather than a Western-dominated view...Although slow to germinate, this idea is now generally endorsed by most art educators, and curricular materials are beginning to reflect an interest in the art of diverse populations. The next and perhaps most important step is to move beyond the justifications and into the development of dissemination of comprehensive curriculum resources. In this way advocacy becomes more than mere arguments for or against particular theories or approaches. The school curriculum is where theory is translated into practice (Delacruz, 1992).
PART II
A TIMELY PERSPECTIVE
Current Trends and Themes in Art Classrooms

The Influence of Visual Culture and Postmodernism

As we advance into the 21st century, current themes emerge that seem to form a blanket over all aspects of what is actually being taught within art classrooms. It is increasingly noticeable how visual culture has unmistakably taken the driver’s seat regarding the amount and types of images that the public is constantly bombarded with on a daily basis. Visual culture is the phenomenon that focuses on the study of aspects of culture that rely on visual images. These images have such a wide range: from television commercials, print advertisements, television shows and film, to video games, comic strips and the plethora of visual images and simulacra that makes up the Internet. When considering visual culture, it is important to realize that it generally encompasses a combination of cultural studies, art history, critical theory, philosophy, and anthropology due to its focus on aspects of culture. By examining visual culture, we are persuaded to investigate the meanings of these images within our culture, which goes hand in hand with the concept of semiotics. Semiotics refers to the study of signs and symbols that are culturally determined and how they make meaning in a particular or cultural context. This would include the study of how meaning is constructed and understood; every time we interpret an image around us, to understand what it signifies, we are using semiotics to understand its signification or meaning (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Therefore, we are continually interpreting images in visual culture and constructing our own meanings cognizant of what ideas and concepts we already have in place.
The construction of such images that we often unknowingly survey as we view them on a daily basis is most effective upon today’s young minds. Children may be more susceptible to such an overabundance of visual culture than adults due to the fact that their meanings of such concepts as identity, community, culture, social issues, environmental issues and the like, have not completely developed. Such massive amounts of value and significance being placed by advertising companies, television and movie producers and factual versus non-factual information found via the internet, can cause children to construct meanings with varying connotations that may be positive and/or negative – an important issue for all educators to be aware of when teaching children.

Another massive concept whose premise seems to intertwine with that of visual culture is Postmodernism. Postmodernism refers to a wide-ranging set of developments in philosophy, critical theory, architecture, literature, culture, and art and is generally described as either being a reaction to, superseding, or emerging from modernism. Developments of postmodernism began largely with an influence by the socio-cultural trend coming into view in an obvious way after World War II in Europe, with regard to the “swift decline of social ideals of justice, reason, and progress produced in its initial forms during Classicism” (Przychodzen, 2000). Viewed as a suspicion and rejection of master narratives for history and culture, Postmodernism analyzed local narratives, ironic deconstruction of master narratives and countered myths of origin. With regard to art, postmodernism perceives art as process, performance, production, and inter-textuality. Art is seen as the recycling of culture authenticated by an audience and validated in subcultures sharing identity with the artist (Ivey, 2007). These postmodernist approaches to looking at art are interwoven with the phenomenon of visual culture; together they encompass a network of trends that can illuminate practical, functional and innovative ways of approaching social, cultural and
environmental issues from within the K-8 art classroom. Looking at visual culture and some of the concepts involved in postmodernism tends to broaden the discourse of art education (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002).

This discussion about art and visual culture from a postmodern perspective can help as this gives the educator access to an array of tools for inquiry. Rather than argue that postmodern critiques generate a mood of mindless relativism, a more positive attitude reveals that there is much to be gained if we see the postmodern ‘crisis’ as one of opportunity. Postmodernism acknowledges a world of multiple realities and discloses places of privileged histories. It challenges the myth that claims space for certain individuals at the center of the universe and instead positions the person off-center as part of a changing cultural condition. Rather than accept the singular vision of the authorial voice, postmodern theorists draw attention to a more intriguing set of frames through which to view things (Sullivan, 2002).

Graeme Sullivan, associate professor of art education at the Teachers College, Columbia University, applies postmodernist theory to art education as he points out the validity of identifying and critiquing multiple contexts of making and assessing classroom art and contemporary art. According to Sullivan, “…visual culture becomes a source of art content that helps us see and understand contemporary art in relation to everyday life (Sullivan, 2002).” Sullivan introduces the work of contemporary artists who discuss their own artwork and in turn, reveal insights and intuitions that give us a sense of how their ideas turn into visual forms, informing the practice of art learning” (Sullivan, 2002). It should first be acknowledged that the way art occurs is constantly changing, yet it remains one of the most important way in which humans achieve individual, social, and cultural understanding. “The elementary classroom, like society itself, is a complex field of ideas and influences that shape the way art is made and learned. A challenge facing elementary teachers today is to make sense of how contemporary art can help their students make meaning from and through art” (Sullivan, 2002).

As discussed earlier, visual culture describes all things that affect our sense of sight, thus art embraces all the areas of individual and cultural activity that influence the things we
make and the way we make them (Mirzoeff, 1999). This said, art should not be seen simply as a means of representing a creative idea in material form, but should extend to include all the products, practices, and processes that are used to help us learn about art. Sullivan writes:

...Visual culture is composed of images that are constructed by others that reflect different ideas, views, values, and beliefs. Therefore, the study of art within visual culture involves not only learning about artworks themselves, but also how others make, view, and understand art. The range of visual forms created and encountered, and the diversity of individuals and cultures that abound, means that art learning will at times include different disciplines, media, and technologies (Sullivan, 2002).

This can already be seen in the classrooms of today with the technology that is accessible to many classroom teachers in elementary and throughout the disciplines and the various extensive ways that images flood through assorted media. We are part of a visual world – whether we choose to acknowledge that or not is quite another story. Art functions in different ways through visual culture and reflects the span of humans’ imaginations; however, how we construct meaning from this assortment of images is not only determined by what we see, but also by the prior knowledge that we bring to the experience (Sullivan, 2002). This is one reason why it is so important to activate children’s prior knowledge before we toss a plethora of new information at them. When children can make connections to something that is already in place within their memories, it is easier for the new knowledge to not only be of more interest, but to enable that knowledge to stick. In elementary schools, the content of art has historically been drawn mostly from student-centered experiences regarding occurrences in the students’ world and within the imaginative mind. Changes followed that aimed an emphasis moved curriculum content towards the embrace of the pursuit of the appreciative mind by looking at the world of art. However, the complexity of art within our current visually cultural world, advocates the need to teach
with the aim of comprehension that develops from a critically informed mind (Sullivan, 2002). Part of developing a critically informed mind comes from creation of a spirit of inquiry within all students. This is so important, from the elementary to the high school levels, and is currently being achieved when teachers provide foundational learning in art history, criticism and appreciation, aesthetics, and visual culture (some of the foci discussed in the DBAE model in part one). Learning about these aspects can help students to develop higher-order thinking skills when considering the environmental, social, ethical, and racial questions around which many artists often focus their works of art. Today’s art classrooms that facilitate not only production, but also discussion, reflection and interpretation are fostering imagination, creative problem solving, visual literacy, social skills, as well as informing students, beginning at a very young age, how to become active members in their community/society.

**Integrating Diverse Cultures and Populations**

Considering art as a vast subject, the making of meaning in our complex world should be built on a greater acknowledgment of diversity. The broad spectrum of arts can help us in getting past some of the prejudices that develop as we grow and learn about violations of human rights with regard diverse cultures throughout history. “Shocked into living with new ambiguities, postmodernism, culturalism and the aesthetic way of knowing will have to articulate their principles with even greater clarity” (Rose and Kincheloe, 2003). Today’s teachers are teaching that necessity for wholeness, contentedness and context are metaphors by which we need to live our lives and treat our world that in the past, “has relied to heavily on smoke and mirrors” (Rose and Kincheloe, 2003). Art educators are increasingly bringing the artwork, traditions, and techniques of diverse cultures into the classroom. This is so important in order for children to construct meaningful connections
to objects and images within their world, beginning at a young age. The earlier that students are exposed to differing skills, styles and techniques, the more tools they will have in order to develop their own senses of cultural awareness as well as uncovering their own identities.

There is a new era in art education theory; one which posits a multi-faceted, multi-ethnic view of artistic excellence rather than a Western-dominated view. This advocacy for an appreciation of multiple cultures grew out of a demand in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s that schools become more relevant to the individuals they serve. Although slow to germinate, this idea is now generally endorsed by most art educators, and curricular materials are beginning to reflect an interest in the art of diverse populations (Rose and Kincheloe, 2003).

Magazines such as *School Arts Magazine, Arts Activities, Art Education Magazine* (The Journal of the National Art Education Association) offer a wide range of volumes that give teachers new and innovative ways to teach art with regard to diverse cultures and populations. For example, an *Art Education* publication in 2005 discusses how to write effective lesson plans while utilizing the work of lesbian and gay artists. Another 2005 publication of the magazine outlined an article entitled “You can Hide but You Can’t Run: Interdisciplinary and culturally sensitive approaches to Mask Making,” and a 2006 publication featured an article entitled “Using Contemporary Art to Challenge Cultural Values, Beliefs, and Assumptions.” *School Arts Magazine* has a mixture of lesson plans ranging from early-childhood education through high school, and is a wonderful resource that most, if not all, art educators use in their classrooms to aid them in developing creative meaningful lessons that often highlight the works of other cultures and populations. *School Arts Magazine* uses themes for their volumes; In the February 2006 issue, the magazine theme was *Celebration*, the magazine’s contents were dedicated to celebrating the traditions, customs, and values in other cultures. Examples from this issue include Carnival, African Kente cloth, and quilts – the magazine issue provides a discussion of procedures and reasons for techniques and methods as well as lesson plans for teachers to utilize and adapt. *Arts*
Activities magazine is yet another publication where teachers are given ideas that stimulate inventive ways to prepare and present lessons with regard to diverse cultures. Arts Activities entitles each issue with a statement on the front such as the January 2008 volume which states: “Fresh ways to teach art history.” Other volumes have focused on media such as the February 2008 issue “Endless possibilities with clay,” and April 2008’s “It’s a fine day for painting.” Though the format for Arts Activities is different in that it does not outline an entire issue on cultures, there are always elements of diverse cultures within the volumes. For example, the Arts Activities issue regarding art history discusses the Native American Cherokee tribe, celebrates the art of the Ndebele people as well as other topics. These magazines are a very popular and influential resource for classroom teachers; they consistently provide new ideas to represent and express diverse cultures and populations that teachers can effectively utilize (Note: All citations for any issues used in this paragraph can be found by using the website citation listed within the bibliography of this paper for School Arts Magazine).

The Addition of Artists and the Push for Community

Unfortunately, for most of the 20th century, artists were thought of as talented individuals who were unusual and tended to isolated themselves. Formalism was the most prevalent art theory of the 20th century and it taught art teachers to focus on the form of the artwork – the colors, textures, shapes and other elements that were presented. Content was thought of as secondary. Fortunately now, teachers are being held accountable by state-wide and nation-wide standards that mandate the inclusion of concepts like artists, cultures, and histories as well as the elements and principles of design. More artists are being acknowledged and community-based art is increasingly being recognized and created within the field of art education and in the academic art world. Artwork that is based in family and
community practices is being increasingly paid more attention (Congdon, 2004). Today’s art teachers have more resources than ever; with the internet at their fingertips, learning about local artists and contacting them is quite simple. These local artists tend to enjoy being guest speakers, doing demonstrations and art projects with children – children are inspirational. An amphitheatre school district elementary art teacher, Lynda McCoy, stated how she just recently had a local artist come into her classroom and teach a colláge project for the students. Not only was the artist interested to come in and work with the students and introduce them to his artwork, he was so flattered by the invitation that he volunteered his efforts free of charge (McCoy, 2008). This is so encouraging for students at all grade levels. Often for students, artists are “famous” people and the artwork is often what is seen (or reproductions of the artwork); therefore, when students are able to see the actual artist, questions are answered and theories are proved or disproved which makes the process a reality by making the artist more accessible to them.

This theme, that seems to be ever-present in art classrooms today, illuminates the incorporation of an artist or community of artists (diverse cultures) into most lessons. *School Arts, Arts Activities,* and *Art Education* magazines have all done an amazing job at featuring artists within their lessons or writing articles about artists that prompt teachers to further research such new artists in order to be able to discuss them with their students and highlight them within lessons. When students have artists to connect concepts and projects to, the likeliness that they will remember the concept is much greater. Amphitheatre Public School District holds monthly departmental meetings where elementary and middle school art teachers come together and discuss lessons and examples and share experiences and reflections of lessons that they have completed with their students. “This is a wonderful way for teachers to get ideas from one another and share resources, not to mention a way to
receive feedback and suggestions from other teachers in their field” (Teran, 2008).

Incorporation of artists is something that can really be helped with collaboration. “It is always interesting to see what someone else knows about an artist that you never knew or thought of” (Teran, 2008).

While incorporating the celebrations and traditions of diverse cultures and populations, art teachers in classrooms today are also focusing on “promoting the study of local art from the community for the purpose of revitalizing the cultural identities of students and teachers by paying attention to everyday life and seeing it in a new way” (Bastos, 2002). Flavia Bastos, an associate professor in art education at the University of Cincinnati, discusses the increasing popularity of community-based art education (CBAE) in the art education field:

As a broad orientation, CBAE describes art education practices that are attentive to possible relationships between the arts and communities. Numerous art educators have recommended CBAE and, simultaneously, promoted their unique understandings and interpretations of it. CBAE has been used as an umbrella term, encompassing diverse art education practices and theories aimed at a close relationship between art education and communities…Working in an economically disadvantaged rural community, these teachers showed knowledge of how local culture, art, and heritage can empower teachers and students to revitalize their cultural identity and examine their possibilities in society (Bastos, 2002).

There are many ways in which art teachers can have students do community-based projects, as the term community is loosely defined. A community can be made up of a classroom of students or for example at Wilson K-8 school; all of the students are part of the Wilson community. Beverly Teran talks about how students in many different grade levels at Wilson helped to create a mural over the library when the school was very new. Different grades were in charge of different parts of the mural; as they worked individually on pieces of a tile mosaic, they were able to concentrate on their own personal artwork. However, once everything was arranged and a larger artwork emerged from the collaboration of many
students, all students were able to feel a sense of community among each other and a feeling of contribution to their school community as well (Teran, 2008).

Another way that students can be exposed to community artwork is through field trips. Actually stepping foot into art museums can be a first-time experience for some students while others may already be quite familiar with such an activity. Regardless, there is so much that can be learned simply from taking a field trip to an art museum, at any grade level as well as adulthood. For many years, Wilson K-8 School in Tucson, Arizona, like many other elementary schools, has planned a spring field trip with third graders and taken them to the local University’s art museum, The University of Arizona Museum of Art (UAMA). When students tour the museum, not only are they able to view artwork by famous artists, they can also see work by community artists and University students as well. Local art museum field trips are a wonderful way for students to see artwork firsthand, rather than as reproductions and it also gets them out into their community. Many of them may not have put together that there is an art museum in their city or which artists display work there. Consequently, after having such an experience, when elementary students at Wilson, the following year, were introduced to a unit on butterflies and moths, students replied that they remembered seeing artwork like this when they went to the art museum last year (Teran, 2008). Thus, the prior knowledge connection is made and the students’ interests are highlighted for the unit ahead. The relevance of art education in the lives of students and communities in which we live is stressed by many. “When teaching and learning are connected to our everyday lives, the educational experience becomes more meaningful and relevant for both teachers and students” (Bastos, 2002).
Identity Issues

In K-8 art classrooms today, one of the most ubiquitous trends is that of incorporating issues of identity into the classroom. Issues of identity are constantly weaving through all classrooms; students at all grade levels will be dealing with these issues as they struggle to uncover and express who they are and who they want to be. In any case, personal and cultural identities of teachers and students are vital resources in the classroom that contribute to learning.

Using a multicultural theoretical framework, Dr. Andra L. Nyman [Editor for the NAEA Advisory] suggests that teachers can help students develop their identities through the study of contemporary artists and artwork from different cultures. Such an approach can help students understand how culture and other social factors affect and influence the development of who they are, what they believe, what they create, how they do it, and why (Nyman, 2002).

Nyman also identifies the elementary classroom as an environment that fosters creativity, independence, self-expression, self-awareness, and a better understanding of the visual world. Art education can provide many opportunities for young children to communicate their ideas and explore their own creativity while expressing themselves using a variety of tools, media, and processes. Students’ perceptual skills can be honed by encouraging them to look more closely within their environment, to reach ease and confidence within art, and to use the skills that they have learned to communicate and express their own feelings and ideas (Nyman, 2002). Development of other children’s understandings and awareness of other cultures and their traditions can be nurtured through art by the teacher and can promote students to become aesthetically, perceptually, and culturally aware. Common experiences can be used to link diversity into the curriculum by also showing students to be accepting and inviting of each others’ personalities and facilitates multiple perspectives (Nyman, 2002). “Teaching about art through this approach recognizes the importance of one’s community, family, peers, values and ideas in the formation of one’s identity”
(Neperud and Krug, 1995). Today’s art classrooms develop lessons that encourage students to express their own thoughts, feelings, issues and/or concerns though their artwork; in doing this, they will be instilled with a greater sense of confidence regarding who they are and how they feel.

**Incorporating other Subjects within the Art Classroom**

In current art classrooms, from the elementary level through high school, students are being taught that art is not only a specialty class, it is also a subject that spans all of the disciplines; elements from those disciplines will often be incorporated into art projects, sometimes without even realizing it. Effective art teachers, at the elementary and middle school levels, often meet and plan with each grade level in the beginning of the year in order to find out the schedule of events and units that the students in particular grade levels will be studying at particular times. This aids in the curriculum planning for the art teacher and helps to enhance art lessons with background information. For example, if students are doing a unit on insects, the art teacher may have them make insects out of clay meaning that the students would be able to put their newly learned knowledge of insects to use in order to add emphasis to their projects and in order to actively engage them in a subject (Teran, 2008).

As middle school students begin changing classes for every subject, in preparation for high school, they are laden with massive amounts of information that they are often required to memorize. If students are given the ability to activate that knowledge in another subject area, such as art, it is often more likely that such knowledge will stick with them. Art educators often give students the freedom to express themselves regarding issues in other subjects that they may not have the ability to freely communicate within their core classes. Writing is always something that should be incorporated into art curricula; students can write
in art class beginning with the primary grades (2nd and up) in the form of reflection, short-story, poetry, note-taking, etc… These examples of student writing often help the student to work through their thoughts and discover what their true meaning is behind a certain artwork. In encouraging students to write about their artwork and/or about the processes followed in order to create their artwork, educators are promoting and activating the use of critical-thinking skills that can be applied in all subject areas and in life in general (Teran, 2008).

Art educators generally incorporate writing, science and math in their teaching of art lessons simply within the nature of the lessons themselves. Drawing portraits is something that utilizes math with regard to measurement and proportion. With regard to science, it can be compared to art in the fact that both subjects are procedural. A person will learn background information and then follow a process in order to create a desired outcome. In each subject area, there is a possibility that the outcome desired may not be the final product that occurs. Art history is one of the most important aspects of curriculum that should be incorporated within art lessons. Giving students a background in information and process not only activates any prior knowledge that they may have on the subject, but obtains their interest and gives them a reason and purpose as to how and why certain artwork was created. Reading about the history of various cultures with relation to how a certain media came to be used artistically is a way to incorporated reading into the art classroom.

**Popular Programs**

In Arizona, it is unfortunate that a recent trend concerning all educators is not favorable in the area of salaries and teacher compensation. In 2000, Arizona voters passed Proposition 301 and increased the sales tax to improve education over the next twenty years. Proposition 301’s initiatives have focused on quality instruction, biosciences, workforce
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development, and rapid response to the new economy. Certain school districts have recently begun implementing performance-based teacher incentive programs in order to improve the quality of education and instruction in Arizona Public Schools. In Tucson, Arizona:

The Amphitheater Public School District maintains a recognized Career Ladder Program that qualifies the district for 301 funding. However, the 301 performance-based programs shall be independent of the Career Ladder Program. It is the goal of the Amphitheater School District that the implementation of this program and any revenues received be focused directly on student achievement, professional development, and established district/site continuous improvement plans. Individual sites shall develop and implement programs that meet the specific needs of the students attending that school. The development and implementation of each site program will result from collaboration of all participating employees. Participants at the site will establish a means for documenting individual participation. However, the site program will be designed in such a manner that the results are documented on a school-wide basis (Amphitheater Public Schools, 2008).

With the performance-based initiative of the 301 plan, each individual site will establish the design, implementation, and evaluation of each program. The progress will be reviewed by an oversight committee. An elementary Art Educator at Wilson K-8 School in Tucson discusses her view of the 301 plan:

Schools are given money from the government and they check the progress of the schools by looking at the standardized tests (AIMS and Stanford Nine). Extra incentive money is given to the teachers who participate in the 301 plan if their goals have been accomplished throughout that year (according to the tests). Each year the test scores as evaluated areas of necessary improvement are sought for. One area of improvement becomes the next year’s focus for the 301 plan. This year, the focus is on writing, therefore there is a lot of vocabulary integration which is wonderful and necessary to have in art anyway (Teran, 2008).

Other schools in the Amphitheater School District have other foci and/or concerns. For example, Project EXCELL is a teacher incentive program (TIF) grant, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs. It is designed to develop and implement performance-based teacher and
principal compensation systems in “high-need” schools that will support the increase of student achievement. The Project EXCELL proposal has five main strands or areas of focus: “1) Recruitment and retention of qualified instructional staff, 2) Date warehousing for comprehensive decision making. 3) An environment of teaching and learning for the 21st Century, 4) High quality professional development, 5) Expansion of leadership roles (Amphitheater Public Schools, 2008).” The improvement of student achievement in Amphi’s “high-need” schools includes several elementary schools, three middle schools and one high school that are considered low in socio-economic status in the Tucson metro area. “The acquisition of the TIF Grant and the implementation of Project EXCELL provides the opportunity to funnel many more dollars to educators and fund projects that will leverage future success for our students (Amphitheater Public Schools, 2008).”

Another program that is currently used by some art educators is known as TAB - Choice Art Education. This fashion of art education supports teachers who are developing, have developed for plan to develop an art program with the purpose of providing student with the maximum amount of choices in their art making experiences in the classroom. The terms teaching for artistic behavior (TAB), “choice-based,” and “centers” are often interchangeable. The TAB partnership is an organization that brings together choice-based art programs from around the United States. The concept emerged over 30 years ago in Massachusetts classrooms through the need for more authentic art making experiences. Teachers with the same beliefs in this sort of education came together in 2001 and formed TAB. Since then, TAB has become a very visible presence on the internet, at the NAEA conferences, and at regional gatherings (Jaquith, 2005). There is a downside to TAB-Choice Art Education with regard to having many different options from which students can choose to make art with on any given day in one classroom. More time in set-up is required
of the art educators in dealing with different types of media; incorporating accompanying art history within a lesson and aiming to activate prior knowledge on a subject becomes less important as a focus/standard; demonstrating proper use and techniques with each media may not be achievable within a class-period time frame; monitoring and assisting students effectively is seen as a great difficulty when there are multiple projects happening at once; classroom management and procedures may not be as easy to establish or to attain; multiple lesson plans and standards will need to be used in one day making it difficult, if not impossible, to meet the requirements of NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and the Department of Educations state and national standards for all students/lessons; etc... The concept of TAB-Choice Art Education may work better for those general educators who are not offered specialty classes and must incorporate art within their curriculum. However, for those who are in the art education practice, TAB-Choice seems to view art making simply as a craft and not as a subject whose teachers work very hard to incorporate other subject areas into the arts as well.

Technology and Art Education

In the past, art has been made with little or no use of new technology, though as new technologies become available, they are often incorporated into the art classroom. Looking back over the technology that was developed and used in classrooms over the past few decades, technologies such as the remote control device, cable television, VCRs, compact disks (CDs), video cameras/camcorders have been used in the classroom, but not to a very high capacity. More recently, with the advent of the internet, interactive television and internet sites, fiber optics, telecommunications, virtual reality, multimedia, etc… incorporating and utilizing technology in the classroom is nearly impossible for some teachers to live without (Gregory, 1997). Specifically in the art classroom, the use of the
computer as a means of presenting information to students has become highly popular and significant over the past two decades. With the advent of the internet, teachers are able to show reproductions of basically any image or artwork they desire in order to present to their students with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation or LCD projector (which most current classrooms are equipped with today). The computer can also be used as a way for students to learn material and to add to their knowledge with the abundance of interactive internet sites and specific programs that are student-centered and sometimes art-specific. “A survey done in School Arts Magazine in 1993 indicated that about 4,000 to 6,000 of U.S. art teachers (8-10%) were using computers specifically, but also other technologies in their curricula (Gregory, 1997). That survey was taken approximately fifteen years ago before there was even such a boom in internet usage and art-specific internet sites and art-specific programs such as Photoshop, KidPix, and others. The use of the Smart board, an interactive electronic whiteboard that is great for demonstrations is another new piece of technology that more teachers are being provided with every year. It is a colorful tool and the research indicates that students respond to displays where color is employed. The board can accommodate different learning styles, is responded to favorably by students of all ages and is an excellent tool for the constructivist educator (Bell, 2008). In the art classroom, the Smart board and computer are quite commonly used in conjunction to introduce students to new lessons by actively engaging them in activities that they can play as a teacher-guided activity, as a class. There are many websites where interactive art activities and games can be found that are age and subject-appropriate for art such as: A Lifetime of Color @ www.alifetimeofcolor.com, National Gallery of Art (NGA Kids Zone) @ www.nga.gov/kids/zone, among others.
It is important for art educators to stay abreast of the new technologies that are available to them in order to find new and innovative ways of interesting their students. Students today, even beginning in the primary grades are generally well-versed in technology usage and often expect it as part of their education being that they are living in the “age of technology.” The information, telecommunication, and multimedia technologies that have come to play an increasingly important part in our lives can also stand for the more general trend toward instantaneity in contemporary culture, involving an increasing demand for feedback and response, one result of which is that technologies themselves are beginning to evolve faster and faster all the time (Gere, 2006). Continuous research, practice and collaboration with other teachers regarding the new technologies that can be used in order to benefit the students and teachers of today will in turn benefit the future success of both teachers and students.
PART III
A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE
Experiences and Reflections of a Student Art Teacher

Setting the Stage: Williams K-8 School
(Note: Pseudonyms used)

Over the past four months, I have had the opportunity to work at Williams K-8 School for the purpose of completing my student teaching experience in an art classroom. I actually had the luxury of working with two art teachers, Mrs. Telle who teaches elementary art from kindergarten through fourth grade and Ms. Wagner who teaches middle school art in grades fifth through eighth. Needless to say, the experience of working with these two teachers has been quite inclusive in terms of media, lesson planning, classroom management with regard to differing age levels, etc… Being a K-8 School, Williams is set up with the elementary classrooms on one side of the school and the middle school classes on the other. This way, kindergarten students are not being overwhelmed or tormented by seventh and eight graders and the like.

I have worked more closely with Mrs. Telle in my student teaching as I have assumed full responsibility of all but one of her classes. In Ms. Wagner’s art room, I am with her for one full day during the week (when there are no elementary art classes) and I come to her room for one period of 7th and 8th grade three-dimensional art class during 4th period. In the elementary art classroom, I have worked with Mrs. Telle in the planning and presentation of many different lessons many of which I taught the students in my experience. For example, in kindergarten, I introduced students to Jackson Pollock and the movement of Abstract Expressionism and kindergarteners also learned about Vasily
Kandinsky in their creation of concentric circles. I worked with first grade students in the instruction of how to create self-portraits while learning about contemporary art and the influence of Andy Warhol. Second grade students worked with me to learn about other cultures and the art of Batik as well as artists such as Op Artist Bridget Riley and Contemporary Glass-Sculptor Dale Chihuly in their creation of Op Art Sculptures. I worked with third grade students in the creation of clay animal bells; students were introduced to the folk art of Mexico and then to the properties of clay and how to manipulate it in order to make ceramic animal bells. Fourth grade students, being the “most-advanced” class in elementary school also created ceramics, but in the form of bowls. Fourth graders were also introduced to Georgia O’Keefe and how to be acute observers in their representations of oil pastel flowers; they also learned printmaking and the art of making handmade recycled paper – two projects that really put emphasis on the process as well as the products created. In my selection of projects and lessons for elementary school, I focused on incorporating many of current trends in art education classrooms that were discussed in part II. For the purpose of this reflection, I would like to focus on strictly the kindergarten and fourth grade levels of elementary lessons that I have completed during my student teaching experience. I will aim to show how these lessons apply to the current trends and themes that take place today’s in art education classrooms by looking at art projects of grade levels on both ends of the elementary spectrum.

Incorporation of Current Trends and Themes in Today’s Art Education Classrooms

Beginning in kindergarten and ranging up through higher education, I believe that giving students knowledge about art history and art process is just as important, if not more important, than having them finish an art product. Some of the most prominent trends/themes that I focused on in the planning and presentation of my lessons at all grade
levels were the inclusion of an artist, giving students a background/art history regarding the process and use of such art, and giving them an opportunity to express themselves or learn about their own identities through artwork. Giving students the ability to see the work of an artist (someone that they view as a “famous person” even if they have never heard of the artist before), gives the project and process relativity and a general interest is provided by giving background information regarding style, media, etc… In one of my kindergarten lessons, I introduced students to the artwork of Jackson Pollock and his method for action painting which was later entitled abstract expressionism. In presenting this artist and movement to such young children, I had many visual representations of Pollock’s artwork and we had a large-group discussion about how he painted (without a brush, largely and depending on his mood). The students recalled aspects of previous lessons by pointing out any shapes that they found within Pollock’s drip paintings, while they also tried to decipher the mood of the artist in looking at particular paintings. When students created their own “Pollock Abstracts,” they were instructed to think in the mindset of Jackson Pollock, being very free in their painting and trying to express their moods and feelings through their abstract paintings. After creating the paintings, the following session the artworks were hung on the wall and students discussed what their moods were while other students tried to guess the mood first and gave an explanation why they thought so. The “Pollock Abstracts” hung in
one of the school foyers for over a month during which I saw kindergarten students on countless occasions point to the paintings while talking to another person and remember the name of the artist. A great benefit to having art at the elementary level is that during these years, students are very responsive to retention of information. In a later grade, perhaps the following year, when students are introduced to something else of an abstract nature, they can recall the action paintings of Jackson Pollock. The incorporation of an artist is an area of foci along with art history and identity. When students learn about movements and time periods, they begin to develop a base of subject knowledge onto which they can build upon.

Another kindergarten lesson with the inclusion of an artist and art history was that of Vasily Kandinsky and learning about concentric circles. Students learned that Kandinsky liked to listen to music while he painted and then they were able to listen to music while they created their concentric circles. They learned about how Kandinsky saw color in different notes, pitches, and volumes of music and his ways of expressing those sounds through different colors in his artwork. Students looked at several of Kandinsky's artworks and were each given a chance to come up to the front and use the pointing stick to find things within the abstract paintings (the paintings were blown up to a large size via LCD projector and PowerPoint presentation). Music was played while students worked on their concentric
circles and tried to think like Kandinsky by using colors that they thought they heard in the music. Students were able to express the colors that they felt matched the music they listened to and in a sense, developed control and ownership over their own artwork.

In a fourth grade lesson on drawing and observing, students were introduced to the artist Georgia O'Keefe. They were given a brief history and background information on the artist and her style of observing flowers in a magnified way in order to attain intricate details. Students created their own cropped, magnified flowers using the techniques employed by Georgia O'Keefe. This lesson was taught over multiple sessions throughout the course of about a month. Students were always tested on vocabulary words and facts about the artist in the form of “trivia” questions at the end of class. Students were given choice with regard to which flower they wished to re-create and what colors to use.

When fourth grade students were introduced to the art form of printmaking, the famous artist, Albrecht Dürer was focused upon as “The Printmaker” who lived centuries ago. Students were presented with a history of how Dürer often created wood-cuts in order to make copies of drawings and representations that appeared in the Bible before there was electricity or other means of copying. Students learned background information about the artist and were shown many of his prints and attention was focused on the detail in each print. They were made aware of the artist’s use of different textures within the prints and the process he used before attempting to draw a
landscape and input many different textures of their own (though using a piece of Styrofoam instead of wood).

In a fourth grade lesson regarding the techniques for making handmade paper out of recycled scraps of paper, students were shown the process and encouraged to take their time and enjoy the process of their artmaking. The process of papermaking involved the pressing of paper pulp (blended paper and water) through a screen and removing excess water in order to create a new piece of paper. The paper was allowed to dry until the following session when students were given multiple ways of embellishing it. Students were given examples of famous quotations and asked to look through the quotes and pick out a few that they identified with or that meant something to them. They could also use quotations from people they know, from unknown sources and from themselves. They were allowed to write personal stories, poetry or the like; the simple purpose here was for the students to take ownership of their artwork and make it personal. They were also required, when finished, to write a short paragraph (free-writing) about what they enjoyed or did not enjoy about the project. Not only does this help students to really reflect on what they have created and what they have learned, but it also gives teachers feedback and possible changes/refinements that would be useful in the next presentation of such a lesson.

In observing my cooperating teacher and her approach to lessons and presentation, she is constantly incorporating trends and themes that are current in art education, even as
ways to explain rather ancient information. Use of the computer, PowerPoint presentations, and the Internet aid in the accessibility of information and image reproduction that can be used in the art education of students. Art history of various cultures and artists (contemporary and historical) are also significant elements in the education of young minds through the arts, along with the quest for identity. It is always important to give students opportunities to express themselves. Children’s identities are constantly being shaped and influenced, especially during their elementary years in school. Once children begin middle school and on into high school, identities are often harder to for students to want to figure out, understand, deal with, and change. The teaching of lessons that incorporate ways for students to learn about and express their own identities is one of the keys to unlocking their full potential. Supporting such lessons with the incorporation of artists and art history is also something that is important for students to be exposed to in elementary school. This way, they think about art as less like just a craft and a finished product and more like an important subject in school that they can understand, relate to, and manipulate in order to express their own thoughts and ideas.

Conclusions

Art education is a content area full of infinite information and possibilities. There are constantly new and innovative ways in which art educators present their information, especially with regard to the plethora of new technology that we are offered today. The influence of visual culture on our daily lives is something that art educators can use as a means of communication and relation among students. It provides a commonality between such an age gap that occurs between elementary school and the common age of educators and allows each group to better understand the other. Exploring issues of identity, beginning in the primary grades, and the discussion of such issues and relation to students’
artwork enables students to express themselves and to visually reflect upon their own experiences. Using writing as a means of assessment is a wonderful tool that art educators can use in developing students’ critical thinking skills regarding what they learned, appreciating the process of their artmaking and understanding reasons for creating specific artwork. Other subjects such as math and science can and should also be incorporated into the curriculum, thus giving students another connection to build knowledge from and strengthening each subject in return. From Industrialism to Interactive Internet activities, art education has run the gamut as far as what it contains and how it is viewed and used by the masses. Beginning as a concept that only paid attention to the product and saw art mainly as a craft, art education has evolved to incorporate the inclusion of so many important issues that are relevant within current society while still paying tribute and learning from the great masters and traditions in other cultures and time periods. It is extremely important for art educators to be aware of what is going on in society and in the world with regard to current themes and trends in their content area as well as in general. Finding inventive, original methods for presenting information and relating issues to students’ lives is the best thing that an art educator can do. In doing this, art educators are helping students by empowering them with the keys to get the most out of their learning by making connections and unlocking the mystery of self-understanding.
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