

Discipline-based Art Education for Preservice Elementary Teachers

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DISCIPLINE-BASED ART EDUCATION FOR PRESERVICE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

Sally Myers

The content of a preservice elementary teachers' art methods class is an area of concern for teachers and administrators. The lack of standardized, systematic instruction in this area has led to inconsistent art teaching in the elementary schools (Rush, 1984) and the subsequent elimination of art from many general curricula in the public school system. This researcher sought to use a discipline-based approach to develop and test a pilot preservice curriculum for use in a one-semester art methods course for elementary education majors.

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE)

Discipline-based art education is a label coined by Greer for an approach to teaching art. This approach contains a sequential, systematic instruction in that art incorporates the "end-in-view" role models of the art discipline: art critic, aesthetician, art historian, and artist. It "should produce educated adults who are knowledgeable about art and its production and responsive to the aesthetic properties of works of art and other objects" (Greer, 1984, p. 212). Discipline-based art education requires a formal written curriculum.

The Need for Discipline-Based Curriculum

To establish a need for this curriculum some factors must be examined: the purpose for art education as part of the general elementary curriculum, reasons for a discipline-based approach, and content of preservice curriculum.

In Arizona the need for art education in the elementary school was established in 1984, resulting in the addition of a Visual Arts Sequenced Curriculum Guide for classroom teachers. Rush (1984), an author of the guide, writes, "Children without art education . . . grow up to be artistically unskilled adults, rather than to be artists or persons who are knowledgeable about art" (p. 3).

Because in two-thirds of the states art at the elementary level is taught by classroom teachers (Mills and Thomson, 1981), instruction cannot be left to the art specialist. Classroom teachers need clear instruction at the preservice level if they are to succeed at their task of teaching structured lessons with identifiable content (Rush, 1984) "in less than three percent of the instructional time per week" (Eisner, p. 66).

The preservice art methods course has two goals: to show effective methods for teaching art, and to teach concepts from the art discipline. These methods are unlike the students' previous experience since most have encountered only a "Romantic mindset" in which art "became a barely structured 'fun time'" (DiBlasio, 1984, p. 2). On the premise that Fenstermacher and Berliner's (1983) contention is true, that "Staff development is more likely to be successful if

the provider models what he or she is urging the recipient to do as a classroom teacher" (p. 71) then the need for a discipline-based art curriculum for pre-service elementary teachers is clear.

Related Curriculum Guidelines

In 1968 the National Education Association published "The Essentials of a Quality School Art Program." This statement included general objectives with a rationale for art programs in the schools. The general philosophy set forth is congruent with those adopted for the curriculum discussed here. The step that is missing is the one of preparation, testing and documentation that this curriculum represents. The general guideline approach to preservice art education for elementary teachers prevails. Colbert (1984) suggests that "Visual arts education for elementary . . . educators should include theories of children's artistic and aesthetic development, curriculum planning, and activities for both art making and art responding activities" (p. 31). Even with the guidelines, the question remains of how to cover all the material and still attend to content.

Recently Michael F. Andrews wrote "Designing an Arts Education Course for Elementary Teachers" (1982). He offers this as a primary purpose: "The ability to grasp the world in concrete, sensuous meaning . . . [to] become self-actualized, fulfilled and self-realized" (p. 19). This is characteristic of a creative and experiential approach to art education and, as such, is difficult to interpret as a guide for specific curriculum.

Published Curricula

Written preservice art education programs are few. In 1982 Guy Hubbard published *Art For Elementary Classrooms* specifically "to help prepare future classroom teachers to be responsible for the art education of elementary school children" (p. xiii). The book is devoted to a comprehensive organization for lessons with instructional objectives and, while the instructional objectives are thorough, the connections to art, especially to aesthetics and art criticism, remain understated.

Two current publications that assume no preservice training have a discipline-based philosophy: *Approaches to Art in Education* (Chapman, 1978), and *SWRL Elementary Art Program* (Greer, 1984). Chapman states a framework with three major goals: "personal fulfillment, appreciation of the artistic heritage, and awareness of art in society" (pp. 19-20), then gives approaches for reaching each of these goals.

The SWRL Elementary Art Program is sequenced simple to complex and contains the features of art history, art criticism, studio art, and aesthetics. It systematically presents information that incorporates skills with knowledge and modes of inquiry in each of these four components (Rush, 1984). It was chosen as a model for this preservice art education curriculum though, with minor changes, either SWRL or Chapman could have been used.

A Discipline-Based Course Curriculum

Decisions for curriculum content were based on writings in art education, including Eisner (1979), Greer (1982), Lanier (1984), and Rush (1984). As a discipline-based curriculum the first consideration for content is "to identify art content that will best present the knowledges and skills calculated to enhance our negotiation of objects we see aesthetically" (Lanier, 1984, p. 232). As to sequence, Lanier suggests moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, Rush and Greer (1984) stress simple to complex and naive to sophisticated.

This curriculum seeks to use those guidelines in all aspects of the discipline: production, art criticism, aesthetics, and art history. Production begins by cutting and pasting one value on another, then moves to line drawing, drawing by adding value, drawing shape with value, and finally adding color. The sequence within the production units builds simple to complex skills with evaluation criteria that becomes less specific as the students acquire an ability to apply the concepts they learn. Aesthetics and art criticism are approached by using the Aesthetic Scanning Model (Broudy, 1977) along with glossaries and vocabulary sheets from *The Aesthetic Eye* (1977) to build a language for the students' responses both to their own work and the exemplars. The students develop an understanding of the art history context by seeing exemplars from specific categories for painting styles and by offering brief explanations of the ideas and concepts of the styles (Day, 1984).

This curriculum was derived from teaching a course with two textbooks: *Art Fundamentals* (Ockvirk, Bone, Stinson & Wigg, 1981) and *The Arts We See* (Lanier, 1983).

Components of a Class

Class time is divided into several components. In addition to the painting style exemplars mentioned above there are lectures and discussions of art education and art concepts, production time to apply art concepts, evaluation of students' projects, and daily drawing lessons.

Lecture

The content of the thirty to forty-five minute lecture and discussion includes methods for writing and teaching a discipline-based lesson and aesthetic scanning. The students scan originals and reproductions by mature artists as well as their own completed projects and this practice helps them to connect the ideas of aesthetics, criticism and studio art. As the students make the connection between their progress in classroom art production and the components of a discipline-based program, they begin to see the results of systematic instruction.

Student Project Evaluation

After each studio project is completed, it is evaluated in class using the following procedure: display the students' work; then relate it to the specific slides, introductory lecture, criteria, and lesson concept; choose one or two pieces for the class to scan. Through participation in the evaluation process the students begin to understand criterion-referenced evaluation as a part of

their high success rate in their own production. All the students' products can be reworked as a result of this discussion before they are graded.

Daily Drawing Lessons

A fifteen-minute daily drawing lesson is included in each class meeting. This is a result of seeing the childlike drawings these students usually produce since they have had little instruction or practice (Rush, 1984). According to Rush the students could improve their drawing ability if they were to "undergo the same kind of systematic, sequenced learning experiences as those found in discipline-based art programs for children" (p. 9) accompanied by daily practice.

Day (1983) agreed that drawing skills are "of considerable use to teachers" (p. 42) and since the students could not acquire the basic drawing skills they needed during the two-week drawing unit presented as part of the curriculum, a short daily drawing lesson that would underscore the DBAE principles of teaching art was included during each class meeting. Two books were used to construct these lessons: **Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain** by Betty Edwards and **The Natural Way to Draw** by Kimon Nicolaides.

Course Evaluation

This discipline-based curriculum was tested with a convenience sample of Art 430 (Visual Art for Elementary Teachers) classes in the art department of the University of Arizona in the 1983-84 school year, with a total of 80 students. To provide initial evaluation data for the validation and/or revision of the curriculum, several measures were devised and used to assess the classes.

An informal pretest and posttest was made as an overall measure of the studio art skills portion of the course. The pretest was a preinstruction drawing completed during the first day of class and the posttest was the students' final class project. As might be expected from the research findings in this area, the initial drawings were almost all childlike. After the instructional sequence, the final results confirmed Rush's (1984) contention and reflected an achievement level that in many instances was the equivalent of beginning college level art students. The dramatic differences in these two products show a new level of understanding for applying art concepts.

As a measure of the students' increasing written and verbal skills for describing art, a written aesthetic scanning test was conducted in a similar way to the art skills. The students were asked to write a paper on a selected art reproduction the first day of class. Two more written descriptions of art work were required during the semester. These sample writings were submitted to informal analysis for overall presentation of the expressive character of the writing and a word count of descriptors that indicated an understanding of the metaphoric meaning of the work. In the final descriptions the difference in vocabulary and organized perceptions are clearly more descriptive of the works.

Further Study

While the evaluation data are limited in both scope and depth some inference can be drawn for further use and refinement of the resulting curriculum. The

results of the pilot implementation suggest that this curriculum should be tested as the guide for different instructors with different groups of Art 430 students. Testing in this manner would allow for intergroup comparisons to control for teacher effects as well as providing further commonsense validation for the general approach in the curriculum. Evaluations should be made more formal and resulting data subjected to statistical analyses.

Summary

As further tests are expected to empirically show that discipline-based art education curriculum is an effective tool for improving preservice teachers' ability to recognize and implement art lessons with identifiable content, this approach to preservice curriculum has already shown some important outcomes for both the teacher and the learner.

Teacher outcomes result in greater accountability in the art program and include using four specific role models as approaches to art projects, applying criterion-referenced evaluations, and using sequential curriculum with progressive art skill levels that will help establish new norms. With this systematic sequencing, teachers in the upper grades could pace their programs to take advantage of the more advanced art training that they can expect students to have.

The learners in the discipline-based elementary art programs should be building a basis of stored images for a life of sophisticated art appreciation using all four role models of the discipline. More than making fun projects, their training will include learning about artistic perception and acquiring a vocabulary to enhance their appreciation with the background knowledge required to make artistic judgments. Aesthetic images they acquire through systematic instruction with exemplars can be used as a resource, as Broudy (1984) says, to extend, clarify and order feelings. Finally, without losing their idea of personal expression and choice in appreciating and producing art, they can have a high level of achievement in art through their knowledge of the discipline.

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