

A Visual Culture Approach for Teaching Meaningful Content through Art

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ABSTRACT

A Visual Culture Approach for Teaching Meaningful Content through Art

Tzu-Hui Chan

This study is an exploration of approaches to the study of art which focuses on content and creating new levels of meaning. It examines postmodern art education theory and provides examples of practical and specific implementation of these theories. Some of the issues to be addressed are arguments for incorporating an issue-based approach as well as the benefits and limitations of using visual culture in the art classroom. I found successful approaches for teaching students to appreciate art as an important part of learning about life by observing one art teacher at work in her classes. I also interviewed her and her students about her teaching methods. Both her classes and the interviews were video-taped. A condensed video document is provided to support the written thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A revolution has taken place in aesthetic and art teaching theories in the twentieth century, and it still continues today. Postmodern artists endeavor to connect their works to the social, political, and historical contexts in which they live. These postmodernists challenge aesthetic qualities and the ability to induce aesthetic experience, and they pride themselves on the study of art for content and for creating new meaning for learning. Postmodern approaches to art education focus on content that is derived from a broad range of subjects, with an emphasis on what can be learned from works of art. These approaches, inevitably, have turned art teaching into a challenge. As an art educator who has been interested in and has benefited from postmodern approaches, I find it crucial that art educators develop methods and pedagogies that can teach meaningful content through art. I maintain, on the other hand, that teaching meaningful content through art does not preclude teaching craft, artistic concepts, or aesthetic criteria. I have decided to search for successful approaches and methods which encourage an appreciation of art as an important part of learning about life. To do so, I have decided to observe one art teacher at work in her classes, and then interview her about her teaching methods. The goals of

conducting the thesis research described herein are 1) to explore how to teach meaningful content through art, and also how to help students to produce artworks of aesthetic and technical quality, and 2) to provide a video record of successful teaching approaches in practice.

Reasons underlying the choice of the research topic

Two reasons led me to be interested in teaching meaningful content through art, thereby leading me to want to conduct this research project.

- *My own learning experience*

In 2001, an article in a Taiwanese magazine, *The World*, reported on the pedagogical success and impact of several elementary art teachers in Vancouver who used an integrated curriculum approach in their teaching. As a result of reading this article, I made the decision to come to Canada to study art education. I arrived here with great expectations about what I would learn in my program of study. I expected, first of all, to learn traditional studio art techniques which would foster both my own art making ability and my ability to teach art, and I expected to receive art-making lessons. At the time, I thought of art mostly in terms of fine art and graphic art, and viewed art as being comprised primarily of traditional media such as painting, sculpture, and drawing.

I can still recall the confusion I experienced during my first visit to a contemporary art exhibition, Atom Egoyan's (August 29, 2002), "Out of Use", held at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art. The visit to the museum was part of a course in contemporary art called "Contemporary Art! An Educational Challenge." I will never forget how lost I initially felt in this course, and how panic-stricken and helpless I felt when I tried to produce contemporary art in my very first studio art class. For me, the difficulty lay not only in my lack of knowledge about contemporary art and the techniques required to produce contemporary forms of art (such as film editing, photography and graphic design software,) but also in the fact that I had no compelling issues to talk about.

I found it very difficult to integrate into the community, to make friends, and to express my opinions in the studio class during my first year of study in Canada. The main reason for this was that I lacked knowledge of Western culture and society. In social situations, I felt I had no compelling issues to discuss, and I had no idea what everyone else was talking about. However, in the studio class, I gradually became more interested in various cultural and social issues as they came up. I started to become more critical about what I saw, and I became a more open-minded person by breaking some of the prejudices that I had possessed about Western culture. Through this experience, I began

to learn the benefits of bringing social, cultural, and political issues into the art curriculum. It helped me to learn different ways of viewing the world and to realize new possibilities through my own and other's interpretations.

Through this studio class, I built the confidence to express my thoughts and ideas both in my daily life and my own art works. In my very first piece of performance art, I asked people to take pictures of me every two hours, over a 48 hour period, including nighttime. Some pictures were taken by me when I was at home alone. In this two-day performance piece, I used art as a form of therapy. By disrupting my life in this way, I was able to remind myself that I was still alive. Furthermore, by undertaking this performance, I forced myself to go out and talk to strangers, in the outside world, and to become more aware of my own feelings and thoughts.

It is exciting for me to see how learning contemporary art has turned me into a critical thinker and influenced my life in this foreign country. Through two contemporary art courses, I have learned how artwork can possess meaning and how art making and learning can create meaningful content for life. Through exploring contemporary issues and developing the critical ability to interpret, create, and critique art, I have begun to examine my own attitudes and beliefs. I have begun to examine my personal criteria concerning the function and definition of art, and more particularly, I

have begun to relate this to my own special interests in art education. Art is a form of individual and cultural expression. Art teaching is an empowering strategy to help students to learn about the self, culture, society, and the world. My personal learning experiences in these contemporary art courses illustrate why I am interested in postmodern teaching approaches such as issue-based approaches and critical pedagogy.

▪ *My own teaching experience*

After identifying my own teaching beliefs, I tested them out by teaching abstract art in an English conversation group and contemporary art both at the pre-school level, at the Concordia Saturday Art Workshop, and the elementary level, in a community center in Taiwan. Problems arose immediately, when I evaluated my own lessons. For the first time, I understood that my teaching approach was related to modernism and the various disciplines. I was still confused about how to help my students address issues creatively and artistically, both through art and their everyday life experiences. I also faced immense pressure from parents who insisted that I teach their children traditional ideas about art. Parents complained that they didn't understand or appreciate their children's art works. The pressure from the parents and the confusion I felt forced me to change and adjust my lessons continually. In order to satisfy my students' parents, I changed my lessons to be product- and technique-oriented, and I taught my students to produce more

representational art. As teachers, we cannot ignore parental influence on teaching approaches or children's art making. Questions arose about how to teach meaningful content and, at the same time, how to enable students to achieve "good" art making results which are visually pleasing.

It is fascinating for me to examine my own learning experience as a foreign student and as a novice teacher, to see how I have made sense of contemporary art and opened myself to understanding, appreciating, and enhancing my interests in art teaching. It is intriguing also to see how knowing about contemporary art has benefited my own art making, art teaching, and English language learning. All these factors led me to be interested in other teachers' experiences and stories about teaching. It has led me to want to conduct this research project.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Postmodern art and postmodern art education theories have offered teachers an opportunity to move beyond traditional teaching in art at various levels. “Just as art has changed over the years, so too has art education changed” (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002, p.1). Many theorists have proposed certain shifts within art education towards inclusion of contemporary issues and ideas. Traditional theories such as a child-centered approach or discipline-based art education were examined and considered inadequate to interpret and teach the rich content of postmodern art, which often explores contemporary social, political, cultural and visual art issues. Current theories such as postmodern approaches, critical pedagogy, cultural and social studies, and integrated curricula are now widely discussed and used as frameworks for understanding and interpreting art, developing curricula, and guiding pedagogical practices in the classroom (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002).

Postmodernism and Modernism

Past practices of art education are based on modernist theories which valued “the study of art for its aesthetic qualities and its ability to induce aesthetic experience” (Wolcott, 1996). According to Wolcott, modernist theories focus on restricted ways of experiencing art objects, such as describing and analyzing the elements and principles of the design and emotive content of the art (Wolcott, 1996, p.69).

Modern artists shift away from representation in order to focus on the line, shape, color, and form of their artwork. At the same time, theories of formalism arose to explain that “works of art were about form, not content” and were purely aesthetic without any practical function. “This became the defining nature of art” (Wolcott, p.71). Postmodernists, however, pose questions about beauty, formal relations, originality, and self expression. In the postmodern discourse, “Art has become critical, critiquing both culture and society. It has become unnecessary to learn the language of the world of art and critics in order to gain insights into contemporary works of art” (Wolcott, p.71).

In contrast to modernism, constructing meaning is the major issue in postmodern art. Because modernists restrict aesthetic criteria and focus on viewers’ experiences rather than on one’s understanding of art, modernist theories are considered inadequate for dealing with interpreting and teaching contemporary art. The primary aim of art

education using postmodern approaches is to carry interpretation beyond the point of merely analyzing the elements and principle of design and emotive content of the art, to understanding and constructing meanings of and for life.

Postmodern art education theories

Postmodernism became “pervasive in academic culture during the 1980s and entered art education literature early in the 1990s” (Stankiewicz, 1998). Because the postmodern theories were rooted in literary criticism and cultural studies and aimed for social and intellectual change, postmodernism had already affected the contexts of art education. Many postmodern art educators have attempted to reform their approaches. There appears to be three main educational reforms in the postmodern art education field: an issue-based approach, a visual culture approach, and a multicultural approach. These approaches have attracted interest well beyond art education, and art teaching within the postmodern paradigm has naturally become integrated and multidisciplinary. Here I will deal with each approach in more detail and then discuss the postmodern pedagogies.

- *Issue-based approach - Art for issue's sake*

Many postmodern art educators (Wyrick 2002, Ulbrich 2003, Gaudelius and Speirs 2002) believe that social, political and cultural issues have become important subjects to address in the teaching of art. These educators call attention to the need for a more

socially responsive art curriculum. We are affected by many social issues in both positive and negative ways either directly or indirectly. Gaudelius and Speirs (2002) emphasize the importance of bringing social and cultural issues into the art classroom. In their view, “schooling is a social process. School is the very first place that students learn to act and interact with people other than their families. Children need to develop a critical consciousness in order to function as a member of society” (p.2). Issues in art connect and intersect with experiences in our lives. Thus, Wyrick (2002), Gaudelius and Speirs (2002) believe that to teach students “how to explore political, social, and cultural issues through the engagement of the students and teachers in dialogues would expose children to ideas that enable them to interact with the world around them as well as to look deeply into themselves” (p.3). Through this learning process, students will develop critical abilities. By doing this, it aims to help student to build their personal attitudes and beliefs, as well as instigate social and intellectual change.

- *Visual culture approach to art education*

Nadaner (2002) believes that “children today grow up less in the forest of leaves and flowers and more in the forest of signs. We live in the lives that we see on TV and in magazines” (p.227). We are controlled by the images around us. Visual culture study “is seen as a way to counter [the] negative effects [of the visual culture] and to offer the tools

for transformative thinking and action” (Paul Duncum, 2002, p.17). It focuses on an understanding of how the consumer market, such as magazines, television, radio, music and the web, employ and promote images and how we are seduced and affected by these images. Thus, all forms of imagery such as hair styles, makeup, clothing, body modification, foods, gender, and body images are studied in visual culture education.

In Duncum’s view, visual culture art education is not focused primarily on learning the elements of the images so much as the content of the images. He urges that “meaning is not simply read off the images themselves” (p.19). People who make, use, and help us to interpret our experiences and other’s responses will all influence what and how we see. The study of visual culture is to help us to understand how images are slipped into people’s daily lives and how we resist and negotiate the meaning of images (Duncum, 2002). It aims to help students to be more sensitive to the visual qualities in their lives and to attribute meaning to what they see. Duncum further emphasizes that “making imagery in the visual culture art curriculum remains important. VCAE is based on both the study of images and the making of images” (p.20). For Duncum, visual culture education in art classrooms is to assist students to understand the construction, through visual culture, of their own subjectivities and to understand how they can reconstruct themselves through making imagery.

Visual culture education promotes cultural studies and critical theory, both of which will enhance the study of mainstream art education curricula, connecting what human beings have continuously questioned with current societal concerns. This will encourage students to look at the world around them in a different and more critical way.

- *Multicultural Art Education and Social Reconstruction*

Ballengue-Morris and Stuhr (2001) urge that “how we live our lives is influenced by aspects of our personal social cultural identity” (p.7). In their opinion, recognizing our own sociocultural identities and our biases will help us to understand the multi-faceted cultural identities of others. The multiculturalism school reform movement requires us to consider the importance of teaching culture and cultural diversity in schools. It is the teachers’ responsibility to provide students with an environment in which an investigation into multiple perspectives and options for living life is encouraged.

“Multicultural education is a concept, a process, and an educational reform movement emerged in the early 1960’s out of the Civil Rights Movement as a means for reconstructing school and society” (Stuhr, 1994, p.171). The purpose of the multicultural school reform is to help students to identify and deal with cultural complexity. According to Stuhr (1994), there are various versions and understandings of multicultural education based on the focus of the curriculum design, the methods, the

content and the goals, such as, Teaching the Cultural Different, the Human Relations Approach, the Single Group Study, and Multicultural and Social Reconstruction. However, not all of these versions challenge the dominant power and some may tend to create a sociocultural equity such as the Teaching the Culturally Different approach. An example of employing this approach in art education is the use of the discipline-based approach, which is based on teaching Western ideas of art, aesthetics, and art history.

Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001) believe that the Multicultural Education Approach and the Social Reconstructionist Approach are the best ways to investigate the complexity of cultural experiences. According to Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, the social goals in these two approaches are to provide a more equitable distribution of power, to reduce discrimination and prejudice, and to provide social justice and equitable opportunities. Multicultural Education and Social Reconstruction are both practiced within the classroom setting. However, Social Reconstruction aims to extend the results to reach the community at large (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001). Learning and teaching in these two approaches is student-based and related to social issues and problems. In these approaches, students are encouraged to have multiple outlooks when analyzing issues. They “[value] the unique contribution of individuals and multiple perspectives within diverse groups from the points of view of the group members in the classroom”

(Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p.9). “Traditional goals of art education including providing children with opportunities for self-expression and understanding the history of Western art are changing” within these two approaches (Nyman, 2002, p.62). Teaching art in these two approaches now demands an incorporation of content that includes art works created by artists who represent diverse cultural perspectives (Nyman, 2002).

Postmodern pedagogy

- *Critical pedagogy*

The complexity of art within the contemporary world and visual imagery of popular culture suggests there is a demand for teaching understandings that comes from a critically informed mind (Graeme Sullivan, 2002). Different than traditional approaches to teaching art, critical pedagogy emphasizes on learning with the various social, cultural, environmental and situational aspects that shape students’ thinking. Through critical interpretation used to decipher meanings in works of art, students will not only learn the form and content but also understand historical and cultural content inside and context outside an artwork (Yokley, 1999). By stepping into historical and cultural perspectives of works of art, the educational goal here is to “encourage reflective self-examination of attitudes, values, and beliefs with historical and cultural critique” (Yokley, 1999, p. 18).

People interpret the different layers of meanings of a work of art through a negotiation between their own knowledge and preconceptions, and the acceptance of or resistance to the ideas that work reveals. In critical pedagogy, teachers offer critical comparison, dialogue and debate in the classroom to decipher relationships among signs, symbols, and metaphors in the imagery. Questioning through written, spoken or visual forms encourages political acts as it offers a critical awareness and opens possibilities for change through self and societal introspection and reflection (Yokley, 1999). Ideally, these cognitive understandings will extend insights into more meaningful expressive and instrumental components which students could utilize in their personal art making. Hence, art and art education become a powerful tool for cultural critique that reflect how society and culture penetrate the personal cultural formation. In the end, “students will have opportunity to increase their perception and appreciation of art as a valuable and important part of learning about life” (Yokley, 1999, p.24).

- *Student-initiated pedagogy*

In the postmodern curriculum, the teacher is no longer the sole authority to assign meaning in the classroom. Postmodernists advocate forms of knowledge characterized by multiple perspectives rather than one absolute truth. They draw attention to a more complex way to view things. Thus, the students’ knowledge and their everyday lives and

experiences are valued. Curriculum and instruction, and the relation between school and home are no longer separated. Duncum (2002) urges that we as teachers acknowledge that there are generational differences in the way cultural sites are experienced. Students have a lot to teach their teachers. Zander (2004) states, “how can we presume to teach students if we do not hold them responsible for becoming active participants in constructing their own understanding, and how can we be responsive teachers if we are not willing to become learners ourselves” (p.51). Brent Wilson (2003) proposes one tactic to teach contemporary art using student-initiated pedagogy. In his tactic, students are recognized as co-selectors of the content of art education. Students are encouraged to select on their own the popular forms and contemporary art contents that give meaning to their own lives. As Wilson states, “this tactic may be as simple as teachers recognizing the enormous amount of visual culture produced by students outside of school, embracing it, and simultaneously celebrating and problematizing it” (p.226).

▪ *Dialogical pedagogy*

Postmodern theory challenges the idea that everyone sees and understands the world in the same way. Teaching in dialogical pedagogy is to construct meaning through both students’ and teachers’ knowledge with respect, concern, and trust. Zander (2004) explains that dialogue is an “open-ended process in which the teacher acts as participant

and facilitator of new and different understandings rather than as a guide and leader”(p.50).

Many art teachers are familiar with “question strategies used to involve students with looking at art” but lack the ability to offer questions which can help students to think deeply into themselves and open a critical and open-ended discussion (Zander, 2004, p.48). In Zander’s comments, “dialogues are not just a matter of asking the right questions or understanding a teaching strategy but are a matter of creating an environment in which the teaching relationship becomes one of open-ended discovery” (p. 49). That means teachers should only share their ideas and insights from their heart and without judgment. Teaching using a dialogical approach requires the establishment of a delicate balance between caring and the authority of being a teacher. Furthermore, personal qualities such as tolerance, patience or the willingness and ability to listen to manage a dialogical relationship with equality in the classroom are also important (Zander, 2004).

As Zander states, “many topics relevant to students’ lives are controversial. We, as teachers, should consider if we have the knowledge and the training or even the right to influence students in different issues and their beliefs” (p.51). For Zander, the goals of learning in a dialogical approach are to encourage the students to develop their own

opinion, to examine different possibilities and to understand through research and problem solving. What students need to learn is to develop their confidence and how to listen and respect others. "Students have to practice their skills in doing research so that they can expand and extend the discussion through related ideas and issues" (Zander, 2004, p.52).

An Argument for an Integrated Curriculum

Should we teach cultural, social and political issues through art? J. Ulbrich (2003) addresses social, cultural and political aspects of art and calls attention to the need for a more socially responsive art curriculum. He makes suggestions for teaching about political art. From his point of view, students can benefit from an opportunity that allows them to explore many of the unresolved problems they have previously encountered in their personal responses to art. On the other hand, Elliot Eisner (1994) questions what postmodernists have suggested for school art instruction. He states: "since the social and cultural agenda is so fundamental...one wonders whether in the end art education will become little more than a handmaiden to the social and cultural studies" (p.190). John A. Stinespring (2001) criticizes postmodern artists use of art to reform society, often without necessary consideration for the quality of these artistic expressions

such as, for example, performance art that focus more on making radical statements than on the subject of art. Moreover, postmodern art neglects serious art making and evaluations based on criteria such as effective communication, design and craftsmanship (p.12). Stinespring states that the “contemporary art world has embraced these anti-aesthetic values” (p.11).

Stinespring further points out that postmodernism, when misapplied in classrooms, can be distorted and harmful for school art instruction. First, according to Stinespring, postmodernism rejects aesthetic standards of judgment about quality and replaces it with judgments using standards from any source. “Anything that is done in the name of art can be valued as equal to anything else proclaimed to be art” (p.13). As a result, we are unable to distinguish masterworks from any visual expression or form of popular culture. Second, postmodernists have rejected creativity or originality as the personal contribution of the individual artist. Third, postmodernists insist that all artistic expressions make a statement about socio-economic or political matters while, at the same time, implying that there is only one correct position to take on those issues.

I agree with Stinespring in that, it is possible that postmodernism could be misapplied in classrooms. However, I believe the main reason for this distortion is that teachers are lacking the knowledge which can help them foster a better understanding of

works of art. Art teaching is more complex than the formal appreciation of artworks or the execution of marketable products. Understanding a piece of art work depends upon knowledge drawn from many sources, and it makes the teaching of art a formidable challenge. In a postmodern teaching approach, teachers will have to “get into the work, understand it, before they attempt to explain it. They will not only have to know about the history of art, but also about the art world and art theories in order to be able to teach about contemporary works of art” (Wolcott, 1996, p.75). According to my own personal experience, bringing social, cultural, and political issues into the art curriculum does not impose a “right answer to these complex issues” but, rather, helps me learn different ways of viewing “the world” and to realize new possibilities through my own and other’s interpretations. It is to help students to develop their own opinions and knowledge through respectful dialogue and critical thinking about issues that are brought into the art curriculum. Furthermore, using social and political content as a springboard for studio art does not preclude teaching craft and skillful composition. While many contemporary artists deal with social, cultural and political issues in their work, they also pay attention to the formal elements and principles of the artwork (Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002).

A Combined Approach

Wolcott (1996) proposes a combination of both modernist and postmodernist approaches. In her approach, formalist concerns are just one part of interpretation. By combining modern and postmodern interpretations, teachers will include formalist concerns and a broad range of interpretations to adequately address the content within postmodern art (p.75).

I experienced this first hand during a visit to Francoise Sullivan's exhibition at the Museum of Fine Art in Montreal. At first, I didn't have any special feeling when I interpreted her abstract paintings using a formalist approach. My response toward her abstract paintings changed after understanding the meaning behind her works of art. In that moment, the colors in her painting took on a narrative quality and became meaningful to me. Various images came to my mind and I gained a strong emotive connection to her abstract art works. I was fascinated by her idea of representing time using colors.

My interpretive experience differed when I went to see Atom Egoyan's work – "Out of Use" (August 29, 2002). My first response to his piece was one of confusion but I was still attracted by what I saw. I was shocked by the technique Atom Egoyan used to mount this exhibition, as well as by the visual impact and atmosphere generated by this

art work. The exhibition is presented in a dark room, lit by the faint light of a bulb, with the sounds of different voices emanating from the dark. The sounds were generated by various tape recorders and other machines that were displayed throughout the room. It seemed as if all these machines, and the sounds they emitted, created an atmosphere in which they were eager to deliver their reminiscences. They attracted me to come close and listen. I experienced a strong feeling of nostalgia without first knowing the artist's intention. These two experiences support why I feel it is necessary to combine modernist and postmodernist understandings of art.

Kristin G Congdon and Doug Blandy (2003) propose a pedagogy based on utilizing "Zines," a non-commercial, non-professional, small circulation do-it-yourself magazine to assist students in understanding postmodernism. A Zine encourages the development and distribution of ideas and social critique through images and text, and various classes such as "Aesthetics", "Theory and Criticism of Visual Art", "Art and Human Values". Congdon and Blandy's curriculum not only focuses on encouraging students to critique and deconstruct the history of humankind's attempt to package information from a postmodernist perspective but also to consider artistic concepts and aesthetic criteria such as effective communication and design.

While other art educators find the topic of postmodernism difficult, boring and irrelevant to classroom life, I believe that postmodernism does have implications for thinking about art teaching and learning for curriculum development and classroom practice. As art educators, we would like all our students to grow up to be creative and critical thinkers, actively participating as members of a just and democratic society, no matter what their vocation. Comprehension, communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills are essential to survive in this society. These skills can be taught through a variety of subjects, including art. Such teaching will benefit all of our students no matter what direction or career goals they might choose.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overall, the research project design was based on an interpretive qualitative approach consisting of in-depth interviews and image-based research.

I decided to search for positive approaches and methods for teaching meaningful content through art. I did this by observing one art teacher, Leanne Levy, at work in her classrooms and by interviewing her about her teaching methods. Leanne Levy is a doctoral student and graduate student instructor at Concordia University who is also interested in teaching meaningful content through art. The study was conducted in the Visual Arts building at Concordia University.

Instead of conducting action research to examine my own teaching approaches, I felt that observing another teacher's approach could help me to examine my own idea about teaching more deeply and critically. Also, it is very challenging for researchers to play the simultaneous roles of both teacher and observer. It is hard for teachers to separate themselves from their teaching, to think critically, and to observe the details of students' reactions while teaching.

The reason that I chose a qualitative research approach was because one of the features of qualitative data is the richness and holistic character of the data that has a strong potential for revealing complexity. Such data provides “thick descriptions that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p8).

Research procedures

The research procedure involved four main steps: 1) video-taping Leanne Levy and keeping a self-reflective journal as I observed her teaching her classes, 2) interviewing Leanne Levy, 3) interviewing Leanne Levy’s students, and 4) editing the research data into a video document.

- *Video-taped observations of the participants at work in their classes*

The purposes of video taping Levy as she taught in her classes were: 1) to examine her teaching approaches and methods, 2) to identify questions for the interviews, and 3) to obtain visual evidence of the students’ work and to document their responses to the lesson taught by Leanne Levy.

▪ *Video-taped semi-structured interviews with Leanne Levy about her teaching*

The objectives of the interviews were 1) to document Levy's biographical history and her teaching approaches, and 2) to find out the answers to the research questions that came up through the observation of her classes.

The length of each interview was about 90 minutes. The interview was a semi-structured conversation, in the sense that I led the interview with guiding questions. The interview process was flexible and adapted to whatever issues arose during the interview.

A short biographical interview was completed and these included broad-based and open-ended questions seeking information about Levy's teaching interests. The biographical history was focused on Levy's teaching approaches and what led her to these interests and beliefs. Furthermore, I also sought information about: 1) Levy's perspectives on teaching different contemporary issues through art; 2) what problems or difficulties she encountered in teaching meaningful contents; 3) how Levy motivated students to address different contents creatively and artistically based on their everyday life experiences, and 4) how Levy taught meaningful content while, at the same time, enabling students to achieve "good" projects that are visually pleasing.

- *Video-taped semi-structured interviews with Levy's students*

The objective of interviewing Levy's students was to obtain their impressions of Levy's classes and Levy's teaching methods. I randomly chose three students who were willing to be interviewed. The length of each interview was about 5-10 minutes. The interviews consisted of a semi-structured conversation in the sense that I led the interview with guiding questions. The questions were based on the different class projects, assignments, and activities in which the students took part. The interview process was flexible and adaptable to whatever issues arose during the interviews.

- *Video documentation of the study*

The final step in my research project was to edit my data into a video document. I edited the videotape interviews and the records of the video-taped lessons to produce a video document that parallels the findings of the study. The reason for this action was: 1) to produce a condensed record of the observations gathered during the course of this study, 2) to provide a video record of the successful teaching approaches observed, and 3) to support the written thesis.

Method of analysis

The raw data of this research included the self-reflective journal, the video records of the classes, and interviews with Levy and her students. Analysis involved scrutinizing the statements made by Levy and her students. The responses by Levy's students were examined separately and then compared systematically. Data treatment involved producing a written description of Leanne Levy's biographical information and of my in-class observations. I also integrated my in-classroom observations, which involved the analysis of 1) Levy's teaching approaches and methods, as well as her curriculum design, and 2) the students' presentations of the lesson plan and the visual narrative projects. In the next two chapters, I present and discuss these findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS RELATED TO THE IN-CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEW WITH LEVY

Analytic procedures

The findings of the study are based on both in-class observations and on interviews with Levy and her students. In this chapter, I will first briefly describe Levy's biography, her teaching objectives, the curriculum design, and the content of the course, ARTE 201-Art for Early Childhood. Afterwards, I will analyze Levy's teaching approaches and methods. The results of the interviews will be analyzed in combination with my observations concerning Levy's teaching approaches. Levy's interest in teaching and how her personal experience affects her curriculum planning will also be discussed. In Chapter Five, I will then talk about the students' presentations and describe the findings from the interviews with the students.

Introduction to Levy

"Art is not about what you see, but what you make other people see," Leanne Levy always tells her students. Leanne Levy is an art teacher and has been teaching for 14 years. After completing an undergraduate and graduate degree in Art Education at McGill

University, Levy started teaching in a special program called “Learning through Play” at a community center. It was a special program for children four or five years old who, as their parents had discovered, have a specific talent for the arts. At that time, her teaching methodology was focused on encouraging self-expression and aesthetic awareness. As an art teacher, she desired to relate and associate classroom content with her students’ own personal interests and life experiences. Levy believes that “children at the age of four can be taught to critically look at their environment and appreciate what is around them.”

In the interview, she explains that, although she enjoys teaching children as well as teenagers, she loves teaching adults, especially pre-service teachers or teachers who are currently teaching, because they already have a certain outlook on their profession and tend to be extremely excited about it. She feels it is an honor to be in a position where she can guide other people’s careers in the arts.

Course objectives and structure

Through my analysis of the in-class observations, eight primary course objectives were identified: 1) helping the students to learn about themselves and empowering them to look closely at their own and others’ cultural contexts, 2) helping the students to discover and nurture the artistic and creative ability within and gaining an understanding

of how art can provide a “voice” for each person, 3) presenting a variety of art media and techniques applicable for teaching art to children, 4) introducing popular visual culture as a way to teach art, and to learn how to develop one’s own critical viewing, 5) helping the students to become more creative and critical individuals in an ever-changing society, 6) exploring an integrated curriculum approach for teaching different contemporary issues through art, and 7) investigating one’s teaching philosophies and how they are translated into one’s approach to curriculum development.

The course was composed of various seminars, classroom discussions and debates, two studio workshops, guest artists, and group project presentations. Three main assignments were given in this course: 1) a journal and scrapbook project, 2) a lesson plan design, and 3) a visual narrative project.

Analysis of Levy’s teaching

- *Studio projects of tissue paper collage and papier maché sculpture
- Self-discovery*

Levy designed her lessons with an emphasis on self-discovery, such as in the activities “Expressive Self-Portrait” - a tissue paper collage project - and “We are pop stars although we are teachers” – a papier maché project. In the interview, she states, “My

philosophy of art education really starts with the self because when [I paint], I am being most true to who I am . . . I basically use art as a tool to express what is inside me as well as to express my relation [to] this world.” She further explains her teaching philosophy: “As a teacher, the most important gift that I can pass on to my students is to allow them to begin with the tiny little belief in themselves that they too can tap into their ability to express themselves through creative media and not be afraid that they will fail at it” (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

In her comments, Levy states that most of the students in the class were not art majors students, and so choosing the appropriate media for them, as well as building their confidence, were crucial steps. Instead of using paints or other art media, she decided to use tissue paper for the self-portrait project, because one gets better results superimposing colors with tissue paper than with paints. “What [Levy] finds exciting to bring into the classroom, something that works for [her] and gets [her] less scared about mixing paint, is using the collage approach.” That way, if she doesn’t know how to draw something, or doesn’t feel comfortable drawing it, she can cut text and images from magazines, play with the colors, and superimpose them onto the words. Levy explains: “Today, as I saw my students’ artworks, I saw them play around with the collages. Something narrative comes out of that, and something visual and representational as well comes out of it.

Their artwork really mirrors who they are” (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

In order to build her students’ confidence, Levy showed them that she, as a teacher, still uses stick figures. She endeavored to “show [her] students that all forms of art production can be beautiful and [that they] have to find what works best for [them].” For the paper collage self-portrait project, she encouraged her students to first draw themselves with simple black outlines, ignoring the details, but trying to capture the main features of the face. Abstract expressionism and cartoon styles were encouraged. Students were asked to consider questions such as which are the colors that best represent who they are. They were further encouraged to cut out various pictures or words from magazines and combine them with their narrative self-portraits.

I view this approach as both beneficial and meaningful. The self-portrait is an excellent means to start teaching meaningful content through art. In each of her student’s self-portraits, I saw both complex personalities and strong emotions. Some of the students’ portraits even told stories and portrayed circumstances in their lives. The self-portrait has been a method of self-exploration ever since humans first gazed at their own reflection in a pool of water. Many artists have used self-portraiture as an exploration, an opportunity to see beyond the image in the mirror and begin to search

within their souls. This project helped the students to gaze into their mirrors and attempt to grasp their identities.

The other lesson, “We are pop stars although we are teachers,” was another successful lesson in which Levy helped the students to find their identities through deconstructing cultural identity representations in popular culture. In this project, the students reconstructed themselves by creating self-portrait sculptures that represent their identities as future teachers.

For this project, the students were asked to conduct research about a pop star icon that they feel personally connected to. The students not only had to research information about their pop star’s biography, but also had to look deeply into themselves. They were encouraged to seek out commonalities between themselves and the icons that they in some way look up to and that influenced them throughout their childhood and adolescent years. The students were encouraged to consider questions such as what is popular culture, what was most important to them as a teenage girl, from where did they get their inspirations in constructing their identities as teenage girls, and how their role models influenced the way they thought and dressed. Students were asked to visually document their research through various art media and to write a one page self-reflective report which best illustrated what they had learned from the project.

Levy always “[tells her students to] look at what they made as a mirror to themselves and to document their discoveries. Once they put pen to paper, it becomes more [a] part of who they are” (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

According to Levy, this is an exercise that aims to help the students 1) to remember their high school days and thereby to create empathy with their future students, and 2) to be aware of how we are seduced and affected by images in the popular culture.

In the interview, Levy emphasizes,

I believe that in order to become a great teacher, not only just a good teacher, a great teacher, who has the ability to become a strong role model and someone who could motivate kids to potentially choose careers in the arts is someone who knows themselves well and somebody who is not afraid to talk in front of people and young people (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

She goes on to explain,

As adults we all recognize when we go through our teenage years, we may go through rebellious phases and dress in different ways of fashion because of the influence public culture has on us. However, as we get older, a lot of teachers get scared of their students dressing in certain ways, for instance Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. Kids are receiving certain messages that they are not aware of and might be potentially harmful to their identities and their well-being. Thus, in this project, I tried to bring popular culture as a tool for my teachers to realize the influence it had as well in shaping their own identities and to remember how they too once wanted to provoke and wanted to rebel. Therefore, when they go through this exercise, they remember their naughty days and become less fearful of kids and teenagers today. This is a big part of my philosophy (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

As Barrett (2003) believes, learners of all ages can successfully decipher the many messages circulating in the images and objects of visual culture if given the opportunity. Levy led the students to understand how the thousands of images in the media that they had grown up with have affected them and to consider the role that visual cultural education played.

Before the students initiated the process of making their self-portrait sculptures, they were asked to do another exercise in which they drew three pictures. An important goal of this exercise was to assist the students to find their identities as future teachers. Each student was asked to draw a picture of a good teacher, a bad teacher, and a picture of the student him or herself as a teacher. Levy encouraged the students to recall their memories of a teacher whom they considered to be good and a teacher whom they considered to be bad. Also, they were asked to identify the key concepts of why they thought the said teacher qualified as a 'good' or a 'bad' one. They were asked to explain the pictures by writing down the key concepts. The key concepts could be single words, phrases, complete sentences, or symbols. This exercise helped the students to go back in their memories and to clarify for themselves something they already knew through their past learning experiences, in this case, the qualities that make a good teacher. They further concretized their own beliefs by making pictures of themselves as their ideal teacher.

Levy agrees with Duncum's comment that "while the impetus for studying visual culture is to develop critical consciousness and transformative action, visual culture art education would not abandon the traditional emphasis of art education on making imagery"(p.20). Levy taught the students to make papier maché sculptures that represented both their cultural identities and themselves as future teachers. As the students were making their self-portrait sculptures, they were urged to keep in mind the question of who they are and who they want to be as role models for their students. Abstract expression and symbolic representation were encouraged. She explained to the students that a pop icon does not necessarily mean a musician. It is their ideal self and who they try to be. In the final art-making process, Levy assisted the students in reconstructing themselves through building their sculptural imagery. Some students' sculptures not only showed aesthetic success but also reflected their philosophy of teaching and addressed issues that they believe are important in teaching children. It was very interesting to see the different ways that many of the students chose to represent themselves as pop icons. For example, one of the students was very interested in yoga. She sculpted herself in a yoga position, as a tree, standing on top of the earth. She discussed the earth and how the center of the earth must always be there. She was expressing her desire to center herself and to help center the kids whom she will be

teaching. Another student had put herself on a magic carpet, and she explained how that magic carpet took her traveling to imaginary places. This illustrated her teaching philosophy with kids; the metaphor was being used to show her intention to bring kids from one adventure to another. Another student used the metaphor of a musical note to represent her ideal self. Her teaching philosophy is to help her students to find the melody of their lives. As Levy states, the students themselves were very proud of what they had made and of the people that they were turning into and of what kind of teacher they wanted to be.

Art is cultural and social expression. "Culture provides beliefs, values, and patterns that give meaning to and structure to life" (Ballengee-Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr, 2001, p.6). Thus, art offers a powerful vehicle for learning about the self and about the culture. For me, this was a fascinating lesson. It focused on learning aesthetic concepts of making papier maché sculptures, but it also aided the students to explore different issues and develop critical agencies to interpret and critique the visual culture that surrounds them. The students looked deeply into themselves and began to build their own attitudes and beliefs. I believe that the emphasis of teaching meaningful content through art should be on assisting the students to understand and create meaning from and for life. Both of the studio projects, tissue paper collage and papier maché

sculpture, empowered the students to investigate the intricacies of the self and deep private experience. Education through art can provide opportunities for exploring the self through the use of materials, processes and tools (Nyman,2002). Both the popular icon research and the self-discovery through collage project are two ways to use the daily life experience of students to begin to get them to understand who they are. The tissue paper painting and papier maché sculpture are fun and easy media to work with and helped students to feel more comfortable about the process of art making. These two lessons answered my questions about how to teach meaningful content through art by relating it to students' lives. The answer is contained in what Nyman (2002) wrote, that "recognizing the cultural resources and experience students bring to the classroom and connecting these resources and experience to our instruction is the key" (p.62).

- *Guest Speakers: an integrated approach*

As many postmodern art educators have attempted a broader study of art, Levy also believes that art can be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. She explains,

I really tried to take an integrated approach and inter-disciplinary approach to teaching because I recognized that not all [my students] are going to be teaching art primarily. Most of them are going to elementary schools as generalists. I don't want them to feel that art is only about "making Halloween masks" typically, so I was trying to show them how art can help to teach literacy, geography, history, and culture. I really allow my students to have the opportunity to discover what

it is they want to teach and how they can bring art to support their teaching (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

However, integrating a multidisciplinary approach into art teaching makes the teaching of art a formidable challenge because teachers need to possess knowledge drawn from many different sources. In Levy's opinion, the best way to solve this problem is by bringing in guest speakers. Levy invited four guest speakers into her classroom. Since she does "not have all the knowledge...to pass on to [her] students, it [becomes] necessary to bring guest speakers into the classroom that can present the information in an accurate and professional way and send the proper message that needs to be heard."

Maria Lovett was the first guest speaker. She is a video artist who has worked with youth in community art education and social services for over 15 years. Lovett is interested in teaching social issues through art and has specialized in teaching youth to use video as a means to communicate and encourage a deeper level of seeing. In this class, she discussed with the students various social issues and how to integrate these issues into the art curriculum. The students were encouraged to brainstorm and construct a concept web, on the blackboard, about issues, problem concepts, or topics which they considered to be most important to teach in the classroom. The students were drawn to a variety of issues such as multicultural education, sex education, peer pressure, drugs, bullying, the environment, and health. After the key concepts, the

guiding ideas upon which a curriculum would be developed were identified. The brainstorming process was carried out in small groups. During the class discussion, the students' tasks were to come up with art projects based on the issues they chose. They discussed the connections between their various teaching ideas and subject areas and charted their ideas on paper. Finally, the students orally presented their ideas and art learning activities based on their brainstorming and webbing discussions.

The second guest, Hest, is a graffiti artist. He presented his graffiti artworks, discussed the history of graffiti art with the students, and taught them to design their own texts. According to Levy, the objectives of this lesson were to encourage the students to "welcome graffiti as a wonderful and powerful art tool and to teach kids that art is not only what you see in paintings but could actually be done on the street." She asserts that the content of art education should include artworks that are not displayed in the galleries or museums, such as the vast realm of visual culture in our daily lives, including street art, urban design, graphic design, comic books, and cinema.

In my opinion, introducing graffiti into the classroom should not be interpreted as an encouragement of illegal behaviors or the damage of public or private property. Instead, as Whitehead (2004) states, "it provides the opportunity to discuss the social roles that art can play and the legal issues it can raise about the rights and responsibilities of the artist

in a society where private property is important”(p.26). The study of graffiti not only can provide students opportunities for exploring personal expression but also encourage critical thinking.

According to Whitehead (2004), graffiti appeared as an underground form of expression in the late 1960s. During the early 1970s, artists and art critics started to view graffiti as an independent aesthetic and expression of art in urban culture. Graffiti art later migrated to art galleries and museums, became commercialized and was used in advertisements. Whitehead urges that these advertisements and marketing strategies have continued to reinforce the notion of graffiti as artistic form of expression for the younger generations. Today, graffiti is an important aspect of visual culture that is familiar to most young generations. In this lesson, graffiti served as an example of the connection between art and our everyday life. Through this lesson, Levy encouraged the students to look at their neighborhoods and the world around them in a different and more artfully meaningful way.

Furthermore, two “Zines” artists presented their “Zines” and discussed the history and context of “Zines” with the students. Through the presentation, “Zines” speakers showed various examples of how to critique social issues and convey ideas through images and texts. The objectives of the lesson were 1) to introduce “Zines” in order to

encourage the development and distribution of ideas and social critique through images and texts and 2) to show the students different “Zines” styles that they could adopt in designing their visual narratives and lesson plan design projects.

- *A student- initiated and dialogical approach to curriculum*

Most of the courses were composed of classroom discussions and debates. In the classes, Levy always encouraged the students to bring their opinions and share their insights with others. Whether doing the pop star research, or one of the three main assignments (the journal and scrapbook, the lesson plan design, or the visual narrative project), students were taught to select content and issues that offer meaning to their lives.

Levy states,

I strongly feel that by bringing the issues that kids live today, which I called student-initiated teaching, we can hopefully encourage greater ownership over kids’ educational learning experiences . . . children will be excited to learn because it is really about learning who they are and the world they live in as opposed to indoctrinating them with a way of thinking that may not have any meaning to them whatsoever (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

One thing I observed in the class is that Levy always got very excited and was also very patient when the students shared their ideas or insights with her. This seemed to help the students to build confidence to freely express their thoughts in the classroom, and to feel comfortable enough to bring their life experience into their projects. In Levy’s

method, students were recognized as co-selectors of the content of their art education. Levy believes that teaching with a student-initiated approach provides students with questions that deserve inquiry and encourages deeper thinking to help them to clarify what they already know and also to discover what they want to learn. Levy hopes, by encouraging the students to bring their life experience into the classroom, that art will have sustaining power in the formal education system. In this way, she also hopes to teach kids how to appreciate and look critically at their world, as opposed to simply getting by and taking it for granted.

Other findings from the interview with Levy

- *How Levy acquired her beliefs and interests*

A curriculum is not only about strategies, techniques and tactics for selecting, organizing, and planning for learning. Connelly and Clandinin (1998) define the development of a curriculum as a continual, dynamic and complex process, which is rooted in personal meaning and linked to specific social contexts. It is teachers' "personal knowledge that determines all matters of significance relative to the planned conduct of classrooms" (Connelly and Clandinin, p.4).

When she was a child, Levy was more drawn to visuals from popular culture than from traditional paintings made by artists. Her favorite pastimes growing up were collecting wacky pack stickers and reading Archie comic books (Levy, 2003, p.2). The very first time she discovered that she was strongly attracted to an art form was when she was eighteen. A friend of hers introduced her to collections of paintings by the graffiti artist Zilon. She was immediately drawn to the aggressive strokes and color palette and found herself wanting to understand more about graffiti. Graffiti art reminded her of comics and wacky packs, full of explosive color, thick black outlines, and cheeky humor to which she could relate. Since then, graffiti weaved itself into Levy's world and became a gateway for her into the arts (Levy, 2003, p.2).

Levy spent several years teaching art to children and youths in a community cultural center. Levy's passion for graffiti and desire to provide a legal forum for the public to appreciate graffiti led her to start her own creative agency called "Fusion" in 1997. This agency focuses on collaborating with young people working in the graffiti medium in the advertising industry. As an art teacher, Levy found that this was extremely rewarding because she was able to help young graffiti artists to make a living off of their talents. Thus, working in advertising further shaped Levy's beliefs about her role as an art teacher:

encouraging young people to pursue professional careers that would allow them to utilize their creative, artistic and conceptual skills.

- *The reasons for her interest in teaching visual cultural education, integrated approaches, and a multimedia curriculum*

Levy truly believes that helping students to make a living with their talents is as important as teaching students to use art as a creative medium to express themselves. Her experience in advertising led Levy to bring visual cultural education, integrated approaches to teaching, and a multimedia curriculum into her classroom. This is because these approaches can help students to be qualified for more jobs where their creative skills can be practiced. Therefore, Levy insists that it is her role to show the pre-service teachers how to find good examples of popular culture in our contemporary society. She is hoping that her students will be excited to adopt this visual cultural education approach for their own classrooms.

Dealing with kids who are bombarded by visual art in their everyday lives, Levy believes that “the best way we can get kids into the arts is by bringing their visual world into the classroom.” Levy teaches the pre-services teachers to use what kids spend most of their time doing -- such as playing video games, looking at magazines, and surfing on the internet -- to learn how to appreciate and critically look at their cultural

environment. In this way, Levy hopes her students can help their own future students to discover “what it is about the places and the things that they are attracted to, and what that says about themselves, by critically looking at visual culture and decoding the messages that are unconsciously sent to them” (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

Levy asserts that all forms of media are valuable in teaching kids and should be introduced to students at a young age. She urges that we should not only promote traditional forms of media, such as painting or sculpture, in the classroom, but should bring in a variety of media, such as computer animation, video, and web-site design. Levy further emphasizes that “if we can encourage students to experiment with the new media at a young age, they will have access to all these forms of technology and media and not be afraid of new technologies.” Levy concludes,

I think it is fine and dandy to say [sculpting] is all about feeling the clay in between our hands. Eisner will say how practical it is today when budgets have been cut primarily to the arts because they just don't facilitate job opportunities. So how can we insure the future for art education? I think we need to open up the world to accept other art forms in visual culture. By doing this I think we can ensure a more democratic approach to learning; as well, I keep stressing the importance to recognize how our entire visual world, our aesthetic world, can really promote different creative jobs to work in the world we live in (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

As art educators, we know that all of our students will not grow up to be professional artists and painters. “Today, art may exist in many forms, as much an idea as an object, animated, interacted, documented, displaced, or hung on the wall, so the learning of art in the visual culture today will, at times, include different disciplines, media, and technologies” (Sullivan, 2002, p.28). We should teach students that art can be used for a number of different purposes.

- *The reasons for her belief that art teaching is not simply about learning technique*

According to Levy, in her own undergraduate art education, most of her studio courses took a formalist approach and were focused on learning technique, such as practicing how to draw and paint accurately, mainly from “still life”, i.e. dead flowers and fake apples. Although other students welcomed this approach, she felt, as a beginning artist, that this style of teaching left no room for her creative thoughts and did not inspire her to paint. She was more fascinated by how to apply color, and how to play around with it, and how to combine the color with texts as a way to express her ideas. She was interested in expressionism movement and used artists such as Henri Matisse, folk artists, and contemporary graffiti artists as role models in her own art making. She did not force herself to master technique right away; and although her grades reflected that her approach to painting was rejected by her teachers, this did not stop her from continuing to

make art in her own way (Levy, 2003, p.2).

This experience led Levy to believe that technique should not be the priority in art teaching and learning. Students should be introduced to a wide variety of media, and then they can choose which media they are comfortable with, and develop their technique at their own pace. In the interview, she states,

It is not about technique why I apply [an] art education program. It is really about wanting to help kids . . . I think if we expose technique too early on, we can scare people off from the arts, and I know my teacher could scare me off, but thank goodness [for] my strong character and will to find myself through art. That there is no way that I'm going to stop and just take his advice. I really have to find my own door. And that is what I'm trying to pass on to my students (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

▪ *Teaching contemporary issues in the classroom: a dialogical approach*

Communication built on care, trust and openness does not come without time investment and risk (Zander, 2004). Levy agrees with Wyrick (2004), Gaudelius, and Speirs (2002) that the emphasis of art teaching today is on helping students to explore political, social, and cultural issues through the engagement of the students and teachers in dialogues. For Levy, the challenge of bringing contemporary issues into the classroom is in helping the students to open up and to address their opinions about issues. She insists that establishing an equal and respectful relationship with students is the key

to encouraging students to bring in their personal experiences and to share their insights with the rest of the class. She states,

Teaching about contemporary issues in the classroom can be rather challenging and difficult. However, I have the device and strategy that works well for me. It is to expose to a large degree who I am in the classroom and to create a very safe environment for the students to discuss their ideas freely without them fearing that someone is going to put them down or that the teacher will not respect them (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

Levy goes on to say that teachers should be patient and allow students to open up when they are ready. She states that there will always be students who are comfortable opening up immediately. These students will pave the way to help others to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences. Levy emphasizes that “teachers should be quite sensitive to the topic they address in the class, and [should] know themselves very well and how they feel in respect to the topic they bring up, and at one point [they should] emotionally disengage if things get a little bit tough.” Levy agrees with Zander (2004) that “the purpose of the dialogues is not to come to conclusions but to get to know other people’s points of view and to examine possibilities” (p. 52). She describes an instance in which one of her students once challenged one of her ideas. It bothered her that the student did not agree with her. However, she took this opportunity to look deeper into herself and realized that the problem was her own personal issue. She later decided that this would serve as the best example to show to her students that the point is not to be

right or wrong and that everybody's voice is equally valuable and should be heard. She adds, "I'm hard on myself to make sure that I do not overly promote anything or overly reject anything, and I really try to stay neutral and, at the same time, exposing my own vulnerability so that they see me that I'm human too" (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

Zander (2004) points out another challenge and risk of bringing contemporary issues into the classroom: how does one create an environment in the art classroom that is friendly to student opinions and welcomes self-expression while maintaining an educational purpose? Levy believes that teachers should make guidelines but not rules. However, guidelines should focus on helping students to respect one another's right to express their opinions and to avoid dialogue that is derogatory or defamatory. She explains in the interview, "I never take the power position, and I respect the fact that I'm the authority role and I do have a certain amount of power to grade them and to make them feel a certain way. I really use that power with the utmost respect" (Leanne Levy, personal communication, April 12, 2004).

Teaching through the dialogical approach requires a balance between caring and the authority of being a teacher. Through the interview, I realized that teaching

contemporary issues in the classroom involves a personal philosophy toward teaching that values relationships and the commitment of time to develop a dialogical relationship of equality. It requires qualities in the teacher such as tolerance, patience, the willingness to learn from students, and the ability to listen. Levy “gives [her] students a confidence that just because [she is] a teacher does not mean that [she knows] more than [they do],” and once the students realize this, we can empower them to create an environment in which the teaching relationship becomes one of open-ended discovery. Levy’s stance helped me to realize that teaching meaningful content through art is not a matter of choosing a theme or topic relevant to the students’ lives that is of interest to them, but more about knowing how to initiate the investigative process by creating a safe environment for conversation.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS RELATED TO THE STUDENTS' PRESENTATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

In this course, Levy gave three main assignments to her students: 1) a Lesson Plan Design, 2) a Visual Narrative Project, and 3) a Journal and Scrapbook Project. It is important to analyze the outcomes of assignments in this research not only because I can use these outcomes to evaluate Levy's teaching approaches, but also because the outstanding outcomes of the students' assignments inspired me and showed me how it is possible to teach meaningful content through art. The students were asked to orally present, in the class, only their Lesson Plan Design and their Visual Narrative project. Thus, in the following paragraphs, I will discuss only the results of these two assignments.

Lesson Plan Design

For the Lesson Plan Design, students formed groups. Individual group members were asked to investigate and develop their own teaching philosophy and rationale in a two-page summary to accompany their lesson plan. The students were encouraged to collaborate, through interdisciplinary approaches, in connecting art with different subject

areas such as history, language arts, and science and technology. Ultimately, however, the lesson plan design had to be based on social issues or visual culture and art. Oral presentations were done in groups, in the form of the students teaching a lesson to the class.

Various social and cultural issues, problems, concepts, and topics were investigated in the students' Lesson Plan Designs. Most of the groups investigated the term visual culture from a different angle. A trans-disciplinary approach was widely adopted in the building of the students' curricula. Since the students' lesson plans were based mainly on these trans-disciplinary approaches, it is hard to categorize them into different subjects. Here, I will describe the various group projects, based on the objectives of the lessons, according to their theme.

- *Media awareness projects*

Several groups of students designed their lesson plan through deconstructing images from different areas of the mass media, such as hip hop music, nutrition, and cultural identity. The primary goals of these lessons were to help their future students to discern how perceptions of others can be inaccurately portrayed in the media, and to assist them in becoming critical consumers of the technological images that they are forced to face every day.

> *Media awareness vs. hip hop music*

One group of students designed their lesson, “Dressing the mannequin of the rapper”, based on interpreting hip-hop rappers’ style of dress in music magazines or on CD covers. The objective of the lesson plan was to look at how the hip-hop and rap industry promotes a certain lifestyle and a certain way of thinking. The lesson was divided into three components. For the pre-activity, the group members brought in several hip-hop music magazines and CD covers. They designed a questionnaire that asked the students to look at the images more critically. For example, the students were asked to identify the features and styles of dress of the hip-hop rappers. They were urged to answer, in the questionnaires, what they saw in the images and how those images made them feel. The second part of the lesson entailed the making of a mannequin doll. According to the group members, they would encourage their future students to place their mannequins in different postures. For the sake of the class presentation, however, they brought in some pre-made mannequins, all making the same gestures, and the students were then asked to dress up their rapper mannequin dolls. Finally, the students were encouraged to share their insights, along with the mannequin dolls they had dressed, with the whole class.

> *Media awareness vs. nutrition*

The second group of students designed their lesson based on the issue of nutrition. The objectives of the lesson were to enable their future students to decipher food product ads in magazines, on TV, or on the radio, and to help them to understand how the media might affect their nutritional choices. The group members offered a survey that asked the students to discuss the topic of which foods are nutritious, and how signs may persuade and images may influence their nutritional decisions. Finally, they were asked to create a poster or advertisement in the “Zines” style; the students were asked to collage words and images to advertise foods that they considered to be nutritious and healthy.

> *Media awareness vs. cultural identity*

The human body is everywhere in the image-world of the media. Magazines, television, and the web are promoting body images at an unprecedented rate. The third group of students created their lesson plan based on the use of denotations and connotations in images of the body and various races in magazines. According to the students, the main goals of the lesson were to help children 1) learn about their heritage and roles, 2) overcome prejudice, and 3) understand how images control our ideas of the body. The students were urged to write a description of what they saw, as well as their personal reactions to the images in the magazines. Questions such as how women and

men are portrayed in magazines and what they feel these images are meant to sell were discussed. The students found the “ideal” female image of thinness and the “ideal” male image of a muscular body on every magazine cover. Male dominance, muscle culture, and the idea of the vulnerable woman were identified in images throughout the magazines. How these images have affected us was discussed in the class. Finally, the group members asked the students to create a self-portrait, based on their perception of themselves.

“Media stereotypes construct a view of a person, and supply us with labels that tell us what to think about that person, and their ultimate effect is to hide that person’s inner life from us, rather than to bring us closer to that inner life” (Nadaner, 2002, p.233). Paul Duncum (2002) argues that students need to know how and why they are seduced by images, and that a connection must be made between their study of imagery and everyday life (p.17). Through these three presentations, the group members illustrated how people tend to take images at face value and are adversely affected by all kinds of media, and it is up to us to recognize the stereotypes and to turn them back upon themselves.

- *Social issues project: Issue of homeless people*

One group of students designed their lesson plan based on the issue of homeless

people. The objectives of the lesson were to create sympathy for the homeless and to offer a good chance for their students to challenge their stereotyped impressions of homeless populations.

They started out the lesson by presenting a film about homeless people and discussing questions about why such people are homeless and how art could have an impact on them. The lesson was focused on both discussing the spiritual aspects of the homeless population and on making crafts. In the class, the students were encouraged to talk about meaning making. Through the discussions, the students began to alter their perceptions of homeless populations. The group members asked the students to create a series of artworks, such as cards, paintings, and worry dolls, and pack them together with some everyday products and distribute them anonymously to the homeless people. They prepared handouts of instructions on how to make worry dolls. The group members provided materials such as bags, boxes, books, toothbrushes, crayons, and canvases, which they could use to put in the packages. By distributing packages to the homeless, the students hoped to help them, at least in a small way, by showing their concern.

There are homeless people everywhere, and therefore this issue, either directly or indirectly, affects everyone. Many people have prejudices against homeless people. Nobody likes to be confronted by the homeless because their needs often seem too

overwhelming. Ultimately, I believe we all want to treat them fairly and justly. As Levy said of this project, it was a wonderful lesson plan. Lauren Christen Phillips (2003) empathizes that children have many complexities that need nurturing. Empathy, for example, is a valuable human characteristic that must be nurtured. In addition to learning how to read and write, children need to learn how to work with others and to respect differences in order to grow creatively. Through art lessons like this one, young children can learn how to treat others with respect and construct meaningful art experiences that have relevance to their lives. The art project of this lesson was extremely functional and managed to get everyone involved very easily. Many schools have classes in which the students make various functional objects, such as ceramics, and these classes can be conceptualized for a more socially responsive curriculum as was done here. These group members illustrated for me an excellent example of a lesson plan that teaches social issues in the art classroom.

- *Issue of social pressure*

Several groups of students designed their lesson plans to focus on dealing with different kinds of pressures, such as peer pressure and parent divorce anxiety. They believe that art can be used as a therapy to relieve these pressures and to help their future

students to deal with their emotions. One group of students, for example, integrated yoga into their art teaching; this was being used as a motivational activity to help the students to relax and be more aware of their bodies. Before initiating the art making, however, the group members encouraged the students to feel the texture of different materials. They encouraged them to think about questions such as how they feel when they are stressed or relaxed, and then to relate their feelings to the textures. For the art production, the students were asked to make a picture of their bodies when they are stressed and a picture of their bodies when they are relaxed. The students were encouraged to incorporate different textures into their paintings.

This would be an interesting project to work on with children. It is true that being aware of our bodies sharpens our sensitivities, and an imaginative and sensitive mind is essential in both art making and art interpretation. "Our sensory experience, both external and internal, shapes our way of imagining and therefore our thinking" (Hannaford, 1005, p.20). What I love about this project is that it will not only help students to cultivate their creative expression but will also benefit their health. As educators, we all know the importance of providing students with art experiences that utilize imaginative forms of thought in artistic expression.

Visual Narrative Project

In the Visual Narrative Project, students were asked to draw and design a comic book, fairytale, or visual diary which exemplifies their teaching philosophy to children, choosing a theme that addresses something they believe is important in teaching their future students. Oral presentations were done individually.

Like in the Lesson Plan Design, issues of nutrition, body image, peer pressure, cultural identity, and multicultural education were widely explored in the students' Visual Narrative projects. The results of these presentations went in two different directions: some of the students created their Visual Narrative as a storybook for teaching; other students used their storybooks as examples for their future lessons. These students intended to use storytelling as an exploratory tool to get their students to understand themselves better and to help find their identities. Here I will offer several examples of the students' projects.

One student used the Visual Narrative Project to address the issue of media and food. She created two storybooks. One was the story of a coffee bean and the other was the story of a "fair trade" coffee bean. Both kinds of coffee bean shared the same history of how they grew up, became coffee beans, and were distributed to the markets. The people who planted the coffee beans, however, had two different stories. The families

who grew the fair trade coffee were living a happy life because they were being paid fairly. In contrast, the other families were not able to feed their kids, nor able to afford their education, because they were being paid unfairly. By comparing these two stories, she aimed to teach kids about the power we possess as consumers and how our choices might affect or help others. Another student, having a multicultural background, made a storybook about her family. In the story, she described the roots of her family, and as she introduced each family member, she included, on the back of each page, maps and pictures of famous attractions of the countries from which her family members originated. The main goal of her storybook was to celebrate cultural diversity and to incorporate that with the learning of geography. Another student made a story called "I'm a girl. There is no doubt," in which she explored the issue of female identity. She sent out a mass e-mail calling for drawings from women of different ages. She asked them to make a picture that to them represented the female identity. She then turned their pictures into a book. This book exemplifies her future lesson. She is going to ask her students, both boys and girls, to draw pictures that to them represent what it means to be a boy or a girl. She will then collect her students' drawings into a book and use it as a motivational tool with which to initiate discussions about cultural identities.

As an educator who is interested in children's book illustrations, it was exciting and

inspiring for me to see how the students incorporated their teaching beliefs and interests into their storybooks. According to my own teaching and learning experience, I find that storytelling increases children's attention spans and, in many significant ways, enhances cognition. Kellman (1995) believes the function of narrative as a method of thinking, of sharing experience, is as important in the lives of children and as adults. In Kellman's view, narrative is important because it is a means of inventing, thinking, and a way of giving life to hopes and dreams. Children's narrative art provides a chance for these child artists to share their imagination and their particular daily experience. Asking students to write down their stories, not only enables students to think but also helps them to sharpen their writing ability. Students could learn how to express themselves from verbal description and to translate into visual image their own stories.

This is why I am interested in teaching art through storytelling, because storytelling might be the most interesting and efficient way to communicate to my students the implications of various issues. Unfortunately, it is also extremely difficult to find a storybook that is both age appropriate and fits in with the content I am trying to teach. I think it is therefore a fascinating prospect to encourage teachers to create a storybook themselves. I also believe that making a storybook could be an excellent project to work on with the kids, to get them involved from the very beginning. Barakett and Saccá

(2002) state that people's stories help them to develop critical consciousness, to generate the language of possibility, and to further influence their future thoughts and actions. They believe that narrative can empower both teachers and students to address our dilemmas and alter education. One example of how to use narrative in teaching could be that a teacher introduces the kids to an issue or a problem by starting a story, and then asks the students to think about the solutions to the problem, or to relate their own experience to the problem. Through the thinking process and by addressing their opinions and experiences either by words or images, students will build a critical conscience. By sharing ideas in dialogue, it will foster empowerment and will influence students' thoughts, develop language possibilities, and construct different forms of knowledge.

Findings of the student interviews

The process of interviewing Levy's students was very flexible. The students were asked to comment on Levy's teaching and the class projects, assignments, and activities in which they took part. All participants appeared to benefit from Levy's teaching and enjoyed the course. Here I will describe several students' responses from the interviews.

- *Students' responses to Levy's teaching*

According to the students I interviewed, what impressed them the most about Levy was her enthusiasm and her positive attitudes about teaching. Jasmine, the first person I interviewed, found that Levy "loved teaching" and that this love transferred itself to the class. She very much appreciated the way Levy conducted the course, "to make it very interesting [and to learn] what [they] were [learning] by focusing on the process." Daria, another student I interviewed, felt that Levy was the first teacher to talk to her as much as she did during her three years of study at Concordia University. She says that Levy "knows how to talk to everyone specifically . . . [and] to approach everyone individually."

They appreciated the fact that there were so few limitations in the assigned projects. New ideas and different points of view were allowable and encouraged. "It allowed me to have the opportunity to explore my own points of view and my own style

of creating things because it was not rigid,” Jasmine explains. She smiled and went on to say, “For the final [Visual Narrative] project, I was able to...create something for myself and did not specifically relate it to my approaches of teaching, but it reflects some of my points of view. I very enjoyed putting it together.” Daria appreciated that Levy encouraged them to bring their life experience into the class and helped her to understand more about herself. She asserts that Levy brought her to “break her prejudices and made her a better person.” Daria states, “[Levy] is not trying to teach us theories . . . [but is] basing her teaching on our own experience of life and she is not judging us at all from whatever areas . . . and backgrounds we are coming from.” Another student, Sabrina, was surprised and felt amazed that Levy managed to help her want to take risks and try new things in the class. She says, “This is what Leanne did for me. When Levy said try it, she meant it. When she said it is okay if it does not work, and it is great whatever comes out of it, she really meant it!”

Although Levy asserts that she is “a teacher who believes that product is as important as process,” she did not demand from her students to master the techniques. On the other hand, as Daria says, “she made art very easy for everyone to learn.” Daria adds, concerning the tissue paper project, “We used so simple material. I am coming from studio classes where we used all these expensive paints and fancy materials. Here in that

education class, we just used cardboard. Everyone in the class succeeded in doing something great and something [represented] themselves.” Sabrina is a student from the Early Childhood Elementary Education program. She felt that Levy helped her to nurture her artistic and creative ability and gain an understanding of how art can provide a “voice” for herself. She explains that “[she] does not have and [did] not want to have any experience in teaching art or to integrate art into her teaching in the future because she always felt that [she] was a flop when [it] came to art.” She says,

My ideas of [making and teaching] art were using paper plates, sticking buttons on them to make happy faces, and coloring from already set pictures because creating my own picture is not happening. . . .This was just me. That was [what I felt] as far as art can go (Sabrina Petrocco, personal communication, April 25, 2004).

However, after this class, she has very different ideas about what art and art teaching is.

She says,

Art is a lot about self-reflection and self-discovery. [It is] something that every child has to have the opportunity to try. And art can be integrated [into] everywhere. Now I go out everywhere. I see art in different forms and I feel blessed to be able to connect it now. I still don’t think that I’m an artist. I do not think that I am great in creating things. I do have an appreciation for it and I do know that it is absolutely important and crucial for kids to have a chance to try it . . . no matter what [they] are studying, in arts or in any other fields (Sabrina Petrocco, personal communication, April 25, 2004).

Through the interviews, it became clear that Levy had successfully made her students as enthusiastic and passionate about teaching as she is. We can see that Levy also succeeded

in helping her students to be more sensitive to the visual qualities in their lives and to attribute meaning to what they see. Sabrina, for example, changed her stereotyped impressions of art education at the elementary level. She acquired a confidence in art making and art teaching and now wants to “make art very easy for everyone and make it very accessible” in her classroom. For them, art and art teaching are no longer something unreachable, only for artists and specialists. Art and art teaching is used to help students to have a strong voice and to be free to express themselves through the medium of the arts.

▪ *Students’ responses to issue-based, integrated approach to teaching*

The students I interviewed appeared to be very excited about the issue-based, integrated approach to art teaching. They did not know that art can be integrated to different studies until Levy taught them. They all consider these approaches to be very important and would like to adopt them in their future teaching. Jasmine felt that Levy showed her “how limitless it is in terms of [bringing] art into the classroom.” In the interview, she comments on the lessons with the guest speakers,

It was also really great that the guest speakers . . . gave me a greater sense of how people are merging in art and activism. It was just very encouraging for me to feel like I can be part of that world . . . I can do something that is creative that I enjoy but also that has purpose. [For example], you are doing it with the intention [of wanting] to be socially active or working in the community and feel

that you are able to encourage and support others through art and creativity rather than just being very serious and rigid (Jasmine Scarf, personal communication, April 25, 2004).

Sabrina also believes that “it is limitless the way [we] can bring social issues or multiculturalism to art and integrate [them] with different disciplines.” She says, “As a teacher, I definitely plan on bringing everything I learned [in this class] . . . and look more into the arts, something that I was afraid of before and [became] more comfortable with in this class” Jasmine’s and Sabrina’s responses to Levy’s classes led me to believe that bringing social issues into the classroom will generate excitement for future teachers because it brings positive meanings to both learning and teaching. This not only helped them to develop a sense of connectedness with the world around them, but also helped them to transform their thinking and actions, and made them want to change education. Daria said that Levy’s teaching is so positive that she felt that “[when she left] the classroom, [she wanted] to change the whole world and [she] really believed that [she had] the power to do it.” Her Lesson Plan Design Project – concerning the homeless issue - was evidence that she had put her beliefs in the issue-based approach into action.

- *Students' responses to visual cultural art education approach*

The students I interviewed appeared to be surprised and amazed by the benefits of visual culture art education. Visual culture education extends the traditional focus of art education and has made art teaching something powerful and important.

Daria: Before I took that education class, I really did not expect that much of the class. When I heard that it will be about pop culture . . . Oh my God! Pop culture! Pop culture is so empty. There is no message in that . . . but I was so surprised. Really! [Levy] was so amazing, how she brought pop culture into art education. I never realized how powerful art education could be. Pop culture can be a wonderful tool just to get kids' attention . . . My attitude toward pop culture really changed a lot. Before it was really negative, now it is more positive (Daria Andrzejewska, personal communication, April 30, 2001).

Sabrina: Popular culture! You know I never thought about it. Popular culture is opera and Elvis. This was what I thought about popular culture until the first day of the class Levy asked us to look at the cereal boxes and suddenly I realized just how much popular culture is affecting me, especially my children (Sabrina Petrocco, personal communication, April 25, 2004).

Daria explained her pop star research in the interview. She chose Sinead O'Connor as her role model. She showed me her review of Sinead O'Connor's life history and started to talk about her own story. She described the influences that Sinead had had on her, and started making parallels between Sinead's life and her own. For example, Sinead had cut off her hair because she did not want to be seen as a sex symbol; Daria had long

golden hair as well, and also did not want people to like her simply for that. She wanted people to recognize her for who she was inside. She had found Sinead's choice to cut off her hair an inspiration. Daria found this research extremely powerful. She then showed me pictures of other pop stars she admired, and said, "These were pictures [that] really educated me as a teenager I even forgot about how badly and strongly I was admiring Madonna, and how easily today I could judge Britney Spears. . . .As adults we do tend to forget a lot and separate [ourselves] from kids and teenagers. It was good to go back to and to find out that I was not much different from the young girl now."

Sabrina never thought about bringing visual culture education approaches into her teaching because she had never understood the effect that media has on her and her children's tastes. She realizes now that sometimes her children "believe they like [something] not [because it is] what...they [really] like, [but] just [what] they thought they should like because [the] media is telling them [to]." As a teacher, she wants to teach young girls to be inspired by pop stars just as they learned in class. This course made her believe that using the visual culture education approach can reinforce positive values and build self-esteem, if we can teach students to find positive role models in popular culture.

- *Students' response to self-discovery approach*

Both Daria and Sabrina believe the two studio projects were part of a therapeutic process. Daria, in particular, felt that these two projects made her realize how important honesty is for her. Honesty is something that she wants to share with children. Daria says, "I want my future students to allow themselves to be whoever they want to be. I do not want to fulfill my needs [with] them. It is important to let them express themselves and to let them decide whatever it is [that] will make them happy in their lives." Sabrina, with a background in teaching students who have behavioral problems, found that it is powerful to involve "art in a therapeutic process and let people explore the arts." She believes it would be wonderful for children who have behavioral or identity problems.

"Challenge yourself and then your students will be challenged," Levy told the pre-service teachers. Levy did challenge her students as evidenced by the students' statements above. Levy used art teaching as a strategy for empowerment, a way to critically communicate ideas or issues in different ways, a way to learn about the self in the process. Through students' comments on the various lessons and projects, we can see that Levy successfully passed her beliefs on to the students and enabled them to begin to discover their identities, future teaching philosophies, and instructional approaches. She created for the students an environment that fostered their creativity, their self-expression,

and their understandings of the visual world.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the strengths and weakness of the teaching approach adopted and practiced by Leanne Levy.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Various factors led to Levy and her students' success in this course. Levy's positive attitude and enthusiasm toward teaching helped her students to build interest and confidence in both art teaching and art making. The two studio projects using the self-discovery approach led her students to reflect on their beliefs, values and attitudes. By adapting a postmodern student-initiated approach, Levy created a safe environment in which it was possible for students to share knowledge and personal stories with trust, appreciation and hope. The results of the study demonstrate that the incorporation of visual culture and art education provides students with an authentic learning experience and with skills for understanding the visual world. I also recognized, however, in the course of my study, several problems inherent to visual culture art education. In this chapter, I will first put forward an argument for visual culture education and offer suggestions that apply to Levy's two studio art lessons. I will then discuss the weaknesses of the students' lesson plan presentations.

Adopting visual culture art education

It is the beliefs and interests of the teacher that determine, to a large extent, what is included and what is left out of a curriculum. Levy's art learning experience at McGill University and her experience in advertising led her to focus on visual cultural education and to exclude from her curriculum art appreciation, art history, and other traditional art education content. I believe that traditional art education should not be entirely abandoned as we adapt and adopt the visual culture approach to our art teaching. I will begin here by making an argument for visual culture art education while at the same time explaining why other traditional art education aims are also important. I will then share some ideas about how to combine visual culture art education with traditional art education aims.

- *An argument for visual culture education*

Will images in the mass media replace paintings, thus becoming the focus of study in art classes? Duncum (2002) emphasizes that all forms of imagery should be studied for the purpose of developing critical capabilities. It is important for students to learn how to critically negotiate a visually saturated world. Embracing visual culture as part of the art curriculum complicates art teaching, challenging us to accept a variety of types of imagery as worthy of serious analysis. Imagery in magazines, televisions, movies and

the web may become primary subjects of study in art classes. Traditional art education approaches, such as art history and art appreciation, have been left out by some teachers who have adapted visual culture art education into their art curriculum.

While many art educators are eager to incorporate visual culture education into their art lessons, Heise (2004) reminds us that we should not abandon the traditional aims of art education to focus exclusively on visual culture. He argues, and he is quite right, that “visual culture art education should co-exist with mainstream art education programs” (p.42). It is true that visual culture education can help our students to construct their critical understanding of culture, and that identity and meaning are derived by decoding images from the mass media. However, visual culture art education is not the only way we can help students to learn about the self and culture and develop critical capabilities. Various traditional as well as contemporary artworks, including artworks from other cultures, offer rich potential for learning if students are encouraged to think about ideas beyond the artworks. Visual culture art education can also include art appreciation. Many contemporary artists, such as Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman, are making, in their artworks, innovative and provocative statements about various visual culture issues. As we accept media culture as a valid source for study, we must also consider including contemporary artists who are critically interacting with popular culture (Nadaner,2002).

Sullivan (2002) states, “The creative processes and practices used to make contemporary art certainly offer new and provocative ideas and images for learning.” Nyman (2002) urges that teaching about artists from diverse cultures can provide insights that will help enhance students’ visual awareness, construct their cultural identities, and foster their self-expression. This would also serve to enhance students’ understanding of art, as well as help to develop their creative and critical capacities.

For instance, in the tissue paper self-portrait project, Levy brought in, as examples, the tissue paper collage self-portraits of her former students, rather than introducing clearly relevant artists such as Picasso or Matisse. It seems to me that Levy’s intentions were to give the students a clearer guideline for her expectations of the project and also to build her students’ confidence. Furthermore, in the interview, Levy underlined that her artwork was indeed inspired by expressionists such as Matisse and by contemporary graffiti artists. The results of the students’ tissue paper collages were very expressive. The students learned how to use the power of images to convey meaning. The project served as a motivational tool to get the students to start understanding themselves. Considering all this, I wonder why Levy did not bring in Expressionist self-portraits or artworks, to inspire the students in the same way that she was initially inspired. All works of art hold meaning. Locating meaning in works of art through critical interpretation is

an important part of art education. If Levy can adapt her critical pedagogy to introduce artists such as Frida Kahlo and Leonora Carrington, the students would be able to investigate the different issues and social contexts that the artists encoded into their artworks. By examining other works of art, the students could expand learning which may help them to explore and enhance their self-portraits. If the students take the opportunity to examine the world around them, the world outside the classroom, they will in turn learn more about themselves and their relationship to the world.

It must be emphasized again that visual culture education will not, must not, replace all other ways of teaching and understanding art. The study of artifacts and historical images remains important as we adopt visual culture education into our classroom. Duncum (2002) states that “visual culture involves three strands that are of interest to us as art educators: a greatly expanded imagery . . . and the social contexts of imagery including histories of imagery” (p19). Here, I wish to propose a way to incorporate art history learning with visual culture art education, using Levy’s papier maché sculpture lesson as an example. During the lesson, Levy showed several slides of Barbara Kruger’s artworks. She made the claim that Andy Warhol is one of the foremost Pop Artists who blur and question the boundaries between the popular and fine arts. However, she did not lead her students into a deeper discussion of Barbara Kruger’s or

Andy Warhol's artworks. Through studying Pop Art and its historical context, the students could have begun to learn how consumer culture functions and affects our lives and how artists address these concerns in their artwork.

Pop Art, which emerged in the United States during the late 1950s, reflects a significant period in the history of consumer culture. Ducum (2002) states that visual culture art education focuses on an understanding of how the consumer market employs and promotes images and how we are seduced and affected by these images. The American consumer culture of the 1960s revolved not only around the issues of economic planning and corporate growth, but also on the issue of personal lifestyle (Mamiya, p3). Mamiya (1992) states that rapid urbanization and advancements in technology stimulated the boom of this consumerist culture. "Advertisement encouraged a continual dissatisfaction among American families, whose never-ending quest for the good life increasingly came to be equated with material possessions" (Mamiya, p.3). With the understanding of this historical background, it is not surprising that Hollywood celebrities, household appliances, and food products which come from the realms of advertising ended up on Pop Artists' canvases. The goals of advertising had extended well beyond merely presenting information about the products. The Pop Artists utilized the strategies, visual styles, and production techniques employed by mass media advertising.

Why, then, is Pop Art a worthwhile subject to incorporate into visual culture education? Mamiya (1992) asserts that “Pop Art not only fitted into and reflected consumer culture, but also rendered it as a critique and neutralizing any potential for bringing about significant changes” (p. 4). Pop Art clearly illustrates the intersection between art and the historical circumstances from which it develops (Mamiya, p.6). By examining various works of Pop Art, students can grow to understand how artists use art to reflect society. If students were offered the opportunity to critically analyze Pop Art, they would also come to understand that it is through advertising that ideological claims for increased consumption are reinforced. They will thereby learn not only how media employs images but also how artists transform them and use them as a critique to call for greater consumer awareness.

▪ *An argument for also incorporating a postmodern art teaching approach*

Many art teachers consider traditional art teaching, such as art history and art appreciation, to be boring, rigid and outdated. Introducing artworks into the classroom, however, is not merely a way of transmitting information about the artists and artworks. We can utilize postmodern theories of critical pedagogy, student-initiated approaches, and multicultural art education to help students to contribute meaning to traditional art learning. “Art teaching in postmodern discourse is a powerful force that goes beyond

the teachers as transmitters of knowledge and students as receivers”. It is more complex than a traditional art history lesson. According to Heise (2004), “critical pedagogy is a way for students to interact with works of art as they engage in art history, aesthetics, art making and interpretation” (p. 42). That is, students will look at artworks “in a higher order of thinking as they analyze works of art in relation to historical, cultural and societal contexts” (Heise, p.42). By looking at artworks with an understanding of the content as well as the contexts surrounding them, students will also have an opportunity to increase their appreciation of art as a valuable part of learning about life.

Milbrant, Felts, Richards, and Abghari (2004) comment that learning and truth are socially constructed. Historical “fact”, or interpretations of artworks, may differ depending on the points of view of the group involved (p.20). “As students investigate artifacts and artworks of different cultures, students engage in complex inquiry that requires an examination of work from a variety of perspectives, among social dimensions” (Milbrant, Felts, Richards, Abghari, p.20). In the student-initiated approach, students are in control of their own learning, including what they learn as well as the establishment of learning objectives and evaluation criteria. Students explore multiple viewpoints through group discussion and debate. Rather than learning solely from the teacher, students create and recreate their own understanding and knowledge through

conversation with their peers. Learning through a student-initiated approach will also serve to stimulate their learning and connect the students to the world beyond the classroom. Learning about the art history of others cultures will help students to further understand their own cultures and build their cultural identities.

Indeed, the realm of visual culture provides varied insights about the world we live in today. If one of our educational goals is to help the students to live successfully in a democracy, we should include multiple facets of learning in our teaching (Heise, 2004). Incorporating visual culture into art education does challenge, expand and rewrite the limits of the traditional aims of art education. Visual culture art education is certainly an excellent tool to help students to connect learning inside and outside the classroom. However, as we are embracing visual culture, we should not forget that art appreciation, art history, and art making are also important parts of art education. I believe that art is an integral part of life that can enrich and bind together many aspects of human experience. Art history learning, art appreciation, and studio processes will expose students to ideas that enable them to interact with the world around them as well as to look inward.

Reconsidering the students' presentations

Although the presentations that students made in Leanne Levy's class suggested to me several interesting ideas about how a curriculum can be developed from visual culture, it was an obvious fact that art history, art appreciation, and the learning of technique had all been left aside. One student compared mail art and traditional calligraphy to the wording design on a shopping bag, but this was the only case where a student linked the images of visual culture to the world of traditional and contemporary art. Although each group of students did include art-making projects in their lesson plan designs, their lessons were still far more focused on decoding images in the mass media than on art teaching or art making. In the previous sections, I have discussed the importance of art history and art appreciation. In the next few paragraphs, I will discuss the importance of the studio art making process.

I agree that it is crucial to teach children skills for understanding visual culture. I also believe, however, that inspiring, cultivating, and preserving creative expression in children are some of the most important goals and responsibilities of an art educator. When comparing several of the students' group presentations to each other, it seems to me that the students who came from a studio art background were far more capable than the others of designing interesting art activities which involved much more detailed

technique. Viewing art learning as a social and cultural activity allows the student teachers to emphasize the process of decoding images at the expense of focusing on studio process and product. "The creative process of creating meaningful artwork involves the students in a construction of identity through purposeful and expressive language" (Milbrant, Felts, Richards, Abghari, 2004, p.20). The studio process of making art, then, remains a crucial aspect of art teaching.

In the students' presentations, many groups used collage for their art making projects. Some students' art making projects lacked imagination. For example, one group of students introduced the issue of bullying and discussed it with the rest of the class. The lesson was designed for pre-school and elementary school students. The students were asked to write down different things or events which made them feel happy and to draw them on pillow covers which they had brought in. They believed that art can be used as a healing tool to help their students to deal with their emotions.

Now, it is true that art can be used in therapy, and that it is a valuable approach for addressing the issue of bullying in the classroom. However, the group members brought in pre-cut shapes, such as butterflies, insects, and stars. They offered crayons and markers for students to draw and trace these pre-cut shapes. I found the pre-cut shapes to be counter-productive, since using pre-cut materials will probably not inspire future

students to paint creatively. I also question the effectiveness of these symbols in addressing the issue of bullying. Although the group members tried to bring meaningful content into their art teaching, I still viewed this lesson as another make-and-take activity, without much creativity involved.

I also found that some students' art activity project designs were not appropriately child-centered. That is, they provided the students with materials and then expected that they would somehow intuitively express themselves. According to Kinder (1997), when the children draw, they are simply playing with a drawing instrument. Creative expression is clearly not a goal that young children have in mind. The images produced by the kids, however, are interpreted as creative and spontaneous statements by adults and teachers. Therefore, many art teachers believe that we should, in fact, not teach children any sort of technique. I agree with Lowenfeld's contention that it is important for students to express themselves, their thoughts and their ideas, at their own appropriate stages of development (Lowenfeld, 1952). However, it is also important to provide creative stimulation and to slowly introduce various techniques for art making. Looking at different artists' artworks is a good way to stimulate ideas for art making. Each student has different capacities, and some kids obviously need more encouragement and stimulation than others to help them to be creative. I agree that art education should

lead children toward a deeper appreciation of and belief in their own genuine experience and towards the acquisition of a personal means of expressing that experience in visual form. However, I view the learning of technique as a bridge to help children master their visual expression, and as an integral part of their artistic training, which, later, can be freely explored. Creativity and technical ability should not be placed in opposition. Technique is not a matter of copying or expertise, and methods. Technique is understood to be for introducing students to a variety of media and methods. If Levy and her students' lessons had been introduced to a variety of media and to different art making techniques, students would have had more ideas for designing their art making projects. As teachers, we should consider teaching technique as a form of training, as a tool, without depending too much on it or directing students towards one, regimented type of expression.

As art educators, we do not want art education to become nothing more than a handmaiden to the social, cultural, and media studies. As we try to build a more socially responsive art curriculum, we should not forget the more traditional goals of art education. Art history learning, art appreciation, and studio process can all serve as powerful tools for helping our students to learn about themselves, their society, and the world, if we can adopt a postmodern pedagogy. Teaching art appreciation, art history,

and studio techniques from a postmodern approach is very different than a more traditional, exclusively fine arts approach: it is compatible with visual culture art education.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

I have previously examined both the strengths and weaknesses of Levy's teaching approaches and her students' lesson plan presentations. I have also recognized the need for further studies such as focusing on using new technologies (video, photography and computers) in teacher training courses. I will now once again affirm that postmodern theories do indeed have valuable implications for art education, and I will proceed by reconsidering my initial research question from a more informed standpoint.

Implications for Art Education

Postmodern theories have become increasingly apparent in art education literature over the last few years, although a large portion of it has not moved beyond the theoretical. One of the valuable implications, then, of this research is to provide examples of practical and specific implementation of these postmodern theories. This research examines three main educational reforms in the postmodern art education field: the issue-based approach, the visual culture approach, and the multicultural approach. Levy's papier maché project, for example, served as a concrete instance of student deconstruction, through art making, of cultural identity representations in the mass media.

Her students' presentations put forward a number of ideas about where visual culture can be integrated into art education practice. Analyzing Levy's teaching approaches, while taking into account the weaknesses of her students' presentations, allows us to take a critical look at the problems of the visual cultural approach, such as, for example, the exclusion of the more traditional aims of art education. This study has demonstrated the importance of formulating lessons which include all facets of learning, by incorporating postmodern art teaching theories into more traditional art teaching. One of the most effective methods of accomplishing this would be, as has been suggested, to bring contemporary and/or Pop Art into the classroom.

Another valuable contribution of this study is the resulting video document which can be used for teacher training at various levels. The video invites student teachers, current art teachers, and even general educators to develop critical viewing practices and to rethink their approaches. Furthermore, according to J. Amos Hatch (2002), "in some studies, videotapes of classroom action have been played back for the participants, educators, or others, and the discussion surrounding the playback has been recorded as an additional layer of video data"(p.127). The video document, then, will provide a powerful stimulus for art educators to examine their own perspectives on teaching.

Suggestions for further study

Through the study of Levy's teaching approaches, I have recognized the need for further studies focusing on 1) how visual culture art education can integrate both popular culture and visual art, and 2) how to incorporate new technologies into art teaching.

In the Chapter Six, I discussed an argument for visual culture education and explained why visual culture art education should, and how it could, co-exist with mainstream art education programs. Indeed, a visual culture approach has important implications for art education. Visual culture art education is certainly an excellent tool to provide students with skills necessary for living in a democracy. However, the study of artifacts, historical images or contemporary artworks remains important as we welcome the visual culture education approach and adopt it into our art teaching. Some art educators do not feel comfortable including visual culture in their art curriculum because they simply do not know how (Heise, 2004, p.42). It is crucial to further investigate ways in which we can combine visual culture art education with traditional art education aims. I believe the integration of the study of visual culture and visual art can prevent art education from becoming nothing more than a handmaiden to the cultural, social and media studies.

I have also underlined the need for further study regarding how to incorporate new

technologies into art education, since multimedia computer technology is a powerful tool that will continue, as time goes by, to change the way we learn, think, and create.

Recent technological developments such as computers, TV, satellites, radios, and other innovations are contributing to a 'swirling sea of social relations', and all these factors contribute to the changing nature of our relationships with others and with the development of our beliefs and identities and play a role in a process of socialization which is life long (Nyman, 2002, P. 64).

Levy is correct in stating that all children must be made aware of the impact that mass media has on their lives. She believes that we should not only promote traditional forms of media in the classroom, such as painting or sculpture, but also a variety of new technologies, such as computer animation, video, and web-site design, thereby opening the students' potential future careers up to a whole new set of possibilities. This demonstrates that there is a need for further study on how art education can integrate these new technologies, and how pre-service teachers can be prepared to incorporate them into their teaching. Further questions to be considered are: 1) how to design art curricula which incorporate the new media, as well as how to develop a postmodern framework for critical discourse about new media, 2) how to introduce newer media into art training programs and to link it with interdisciplinary studies such as design, art

criticism, art history, and 3) how a technology-enhanced curriculum facilitates constructivist educational goals. Freedman (1997) emphasizes that “in art education, students use of technology must include consideration of both the production and viewing of technological images, as well as the way such images come to have meaning” (p.7).

Teaching students to effectively use new media technology is crucial because many of today’s and tomorrow’s professions use complex technological communication systems. Freedman (1997) urges that “artistic production with computers is an important use of technology for students.” Freedman also offers examples of classroom research which have demonstrated that students of various ages, when working in groups, actually work best when using computers. If we could take the necessary step of incorporating new media techniques into art education, we would expand the limits of art education and achieve the all-important goal of promoting a variety of job opportunities where students’ creative and technical abilities can be utilized.

Conclusions

My analysis of Levy's teaching approaches has helped me to better understand postmodern art education theories and my role as an art teacher. My research question was: "How can we teach meaningful content through art while helping students to produce artworks of aesthetic and technical quality?" The following points serve to finally answer this question.

Teaching Strategies for Student-Initiated Learning and Meaningful Content

>Collaboration & Dialogical relationships: Sharing in the role of teacher and learner

How can we bring meaningful content into art teaching? Based on my observations and analysis of Levy's teaching performance and my interviews with her students, there are several ways in which teachers can address meaningful content through art teaching.

As postmodern curricula suggests, the first step for constructing meaningful content into art teaching is for teachers to recognize their roles as instructors and facilitators of knowledge, and in some cases, learners themselves. As teachers and facilitators of knowledge, we come to understand that meaningful content is determined by teachers in partnership with students throughout the teaching and learning process.

From the postmodern teaching perspective, the teacher is no longer the sole authority regarding meaning making in the classroom but rather this role is shared with students and accomplished through collaboration.

Collaboration to achieve meaningful content can be accomplished through the teacher's choice of a particular theme or topic, but they must also allow students some leeway to determine what is important and relevant for them. This approach recognizes students' need to reflect on that which is important; therefore, it requires continued dialogue amongst students and teacher. Students determine important, relevant and therefore meaningful content through this continued dialogical relationship. With this approach, the students actively share in the responsibility, along with the teacher, for the selection of the concepts and skills they wish to study. Observing Levy while teaching also helped me to understand that personal qualities such as tolerance, the willingness and ability to listen, and the ability to manage a dialogical relationship of equality in the classroom are also all very important. By allowing for the expression of these qualities, the curriculum will enable students to bring their values, knowledge and their everyday life experiences into the classroom.

> Encourage critical inquiry and self-reflection

In Levy's lessons, students were taught to select content and issues that had meaning in their lives, such as the pop star research or one of the other three main assignments (the journal and scrapbook, the lesson plan design, or the visual narrative project). In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I describe how Levy provides students with questions that encourage inquiry and deeper thinking. Providing students with questions that promote self-reflection helped her students to clarify what they already knew while also discovering what they wanted to learn. Based on my observations and analysis of Levy's teaching strategies and her students' participation, I conclude that approaches that encourage and stimulate inquiry and deeper levels of thinking are of primary importance to successful student-initiated learning.

Adapting student-initiated and dialogical pedagogy approaches in teaching, teachers can encourage students' ownership of their own education. Students feel empowered by the topics of personal interest since they are already knowledgeable about that topic. For example, Levy's student, Jasmine, appreciated that there were so few limitations on the assigned projects. She claimed that the student-initiated approach to learning allowed her the opportunity to explore her own points of view and her own style of creation.

Within these two postmodern approaches-- student initiated and dialogical pedagogy-- students will not only learn the confidence to express their own opinions, but also how to listen to and respect others. Students also learn the skills of research, and they can expand and extend their investigation of a topic through related ideas and issues. As a result, post-modern approaches encourage confidence and independence when seeking knowledge. In Levy's classes, the students acquired the confidence to freely express their thoughts in the classroom and to feel comfortable integrating their life experience into their projects. As a result, Levy was able to help her students construct meaning by allowing other students and herself to share knowledge with one another with respect, concern, and trust. It is through critical and open-ended dialogue that trust and meaningful learning are constructed.

Teaching Meaningful Content through Social and Cultural Issues

My study of Levy's teaching approaches answered the research question of how to teach meaningful content by bringing various social issues or cultural issues into the classroom.

Too often art at the elementary level is perceived by elementary teachers to be a series of make-and-take activities, devoid of any meaning in relation to students' lives of the learning that is taking place in the classroom... Development is needed in the criticism and aesthetics

components in teacher-education programs to cultivate an understanding that art teaching is more complex than the formal appreciation of artworks or the execution of marketable products (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002, p.4 & p.223).

Bringing social issues into the classroom aims to help students to develop their personal attitudes and beliefs, as well as to instigate social and intellectual change. It is important that all students develop a critical consciousness in order to function as fully fledged members of society. Visual culture education promotes cultural studies, and critical theory is another powerful way for students to recognize their own cultural identities and biases.

Levy's lesson, "We are pop stars, although we are teachers", proves that visual culture study is a powerful tool to help her students to counter the negative effects of mass media and to find their cultural identities. In the interview, a student, Daria, appreciated Levy's encouragement to bring students' life experience into the classroom. This approach helped her to gain insight and understanding concerning her own sense of identity. Daria asserts that Levy led her to challenge and overcome her prejudices and made her a better person. Recognizing our own cultural identities and our own biases helps us to understand the multi-faceted cultural identities of others. It is important to encourage a more equitable distribution of power, to reduce discrimination and prejudice, and to provide social justice and equitable opportunities. Visual culture study offers the

tools for these transformative thoughts and actions.

In her classes, Levy brought in guest specialists to introduce different ways of incorporating social issues into art making. In Chapter Five, I described the students' lesson plan presentations and how bringing social and cultural issues into the classroom generates excitement and meaning in both learning and teaching. Levy's students successfully demonstrated the integration of social issues while teaching art. However, in Chapter Six, I discuss the weaknesses of the students' lesson plan presentations and clarify that constructing a more socially responsive art curriculum does not mean excluding the more traditional goals of art education.

Art has a unique power to nurture students' understanding and awareness of diverse cultures and social issues. Yokley (1999) states that "a teacher's choice of imagery for study is an extremely important factor that determines the content and political nature of a lesson" (p.24). Various traditional as well as contemporary artworks, or artworks from other cultures, offer rich opportunities for students to learn about themselves, their society, and the world, if they are encouraged to think about the ideas encoded in the artworks. Art history learning, art appreciation, and the studio process can all serve as powerful tools for teaching meaningful content, if we can adopt a postmodern pedagogy.

Aesthetic and technical quality in art production

How do we help students to produce artworks which have aesthetic and technical quality? Teachers can select a medium that they believe is accessible, easy to work with in order to build self-confidence. Through my observations of Levy's two studio lessons, I have concluded that choosing the appropriate media for students in order to foster self-confidence is a crucial step.

In Levy's two studio classes, instead of using paints or other expensive media, she decided to use tissue paper for the self-portrait project and newspaper for the papier mache project. As Levy's student, Daria, states in the interview, Levy "made art very easy for everyone to learn and everyone in the class succeeded in doing something great and something [which represented] themselves." These two studio classes helped me to understand that even teaching simple media can help our students to nurture their artistic and creative abilities and to gain an understanding of how to use art to express their ideas. Levy believes that product is as important as process. She emphasizes that we should first introduce a wide variety of media to our students. Then, students can choose which media they are comfortable with, and develop technique at their own pace.

Looking at the weaknesses of the students' presentations enabled me to realize that in order to be capable of introducing different media to our students, we need to first

explore a variety of media and art making techniques ourselves. As a result, we will have more ideas for designing art making projects.

Looking at various artists' artworks is another good way to provide creative stimulation for teaching different techniques and media. As teachers, we should consider teaching technique as a form of training, as a tool, without becoming too dependant on it and without forcing students into only one type of expression.

In conclusion, my study helped me to confirm that postmodern art education theory ought to influence the approaches that we bring to teaching. Familiarizing myself with the literature on postmodern art education theory and observing Levy integrate postmodern art education theory into practice answered my research question of how to teach meaningful content through art.

Through my observations of Levy's attempts to construct knowledge with her students, I recognize that teaching methods ought to become more open and inclusive. For me, postmodern theories are no longer just ways of thinking, but are practical teaching strategies, which make art learning more effective. Social meaning, multicultural celebration, and cultural identity have an important status in postmodern thinking which makes art teaching and learning more meaningful. As art educators, we should keep considering how these three main educational reforms in the postmodern art education

field (issue-based approach, visual culture approach, and multicultural approach) are best utilized in our classroom practice.

We must provide students with an environment for dialogue in which they can investigate art and issues from multiple perspectives. This combination of critical pedagogy with traditional art education aims and other postmodern approaches encourages a self-reflective study of beliefs, values and attitudes. Developing a critical capacity to understand different cultures, social issues and mass media through art, students can construct meaning in learning and can enhance their appreciation of art.

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