

Inviting Success:
Learning to create holistic art lessons for art education in middle childhood

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to create a pedagogical intervention for 7-9 year-olds attending community art classes, which would respond to the pressure for conformity and product orientation that occurs naturally within this age group. It was my hope that by minimizing these very pressures within the art experience and instead emphasizing elements of creativity and meaning-making, children would become better equipped to persevere through this challenging period of artistic development. My goal was to keep children engaged in the artmaking experience and to instill in them a deep appreciation for art.

Through the reflective practice which formed the basis of my research, I created and implemented a holistic art program in which children gained confidence in their artistic abilities by being encouraged to value their own ideas and expressions in artmaking. Through their actions and words, children demonstrated an increasing sense of self-confidence as they engaged in art activities that challenged their thinking skills and required them to be actively involved in the artistic process.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The purpose of my thesis is to create a pedagogical intervention for 7 to 9-year-olds attending community art classes, which responds to the pressure for conformity and product orientation that occurs naturally within this age group. My theory is that by minimizing these very pressures within the art experience and instead emphasizing elements of creativity and meaning-making, children will become better equipped to persevere through this challenging period of artistic development. My goal is to keep children engaged in the artmaking experience, and to instill in them a deep appreciation for art that will last a lifetime.

Through the reflective practice which forms the basis for my research, I have created and implemented art lessons which are holistic, meaning that they aim to give consideration to the artistic, social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs of the child's development. Within the informal setting of community art classes, children in this age group appear to gain confidence in their artistic abilities, as they are encouraged to value their own ideas and expressions in artmaking.

Rationale for this Research

My concern for this topic grew out of my experience in an elementary school as a visiting Art Education Specialist. In my work with grade four students, I had

the opportunity to develop and implement an art education curriculum which would reflect my own values in teaching while meeting the art education competencies required by the Quebec Ministry of Education (MEQ). Through active participation in a variety of art projects, children were given opportunities to explore art materials, to express themselves, to work at their own pace, to learn specific artmaking techniques, to research topics of interest, and to express their knowledge and opinions through art. Children who had typically described themselves as “not being good at art” soon expressed surprise and delight at their emerging art skills. The importance of positive self-esteem building was of particular relevance as children became involved in the problem-solving and decision-making aspects required of the creative process. Students seemed to thrive on these challenges, were openly enthusiastic about attending class, and expressed great disappointment when they were held back in order to complete work in other subjects.

From this experience, my own private practice developed as children made requests for extra-curricular art lessons. I began with private instruction for individual children but soon discovered that students seemed to be losing interest as well as confidence in their abilities as artmakers because the attention they received from me in private lessons was instructional and seemed to showcase their artistic weaknesses. At this stage of artistic development, children tend to become pre-occupied with achieving realism in their drawings. They must have felt inadequate in this atmosphere; these private sessions were skill-oriented and

felt like work. I decided to take these individuals and form a small group, and to apply the same teaching methods that had been so successful in the grade four classroom, and in all my earlier experiences as a teacher in the primary grades and as an Early Childhood Educator. I realized that middle childhood children responded well to the theories I most respected as an Early Childhood Educator, such as teaching the child in a holistic manner which gives consideration to all areas of the child's development, and by applying a constructivist approach to teaching so that children are actively involved in the learning process. These theories of education have become an integral part of my own teaching style, developed over many years of studying and working in the field of Early Childhood Education. I realized that I needed to apply these theories to my teaching experiences in private practice, re-creating the teaching environment that was so successful at school. In making this simple modification everything changed for the better. We became a community of artmakers and we had fun! This initial group blossomed into four groups of six to seven children, all between the ages of 7 and 10. Theoretically, this period of artistic development is designated as the "literal stage", marked by a decline in interest and apparent loss in what has been identified as "flavourfulness" in artmaking (Davis, 2005, p.67). Through further research and by reflecting on my art practice with children, my goal for this teaching report has been to facilitate personal and professional growth, while ultimately changing pedagogical interventions for middle childhood art experiences.

The research project for this thesis occurred in my studio with a group of seven children between the ages of seven and nine. These children participated in a variety of art lessons that are described in Chapter VI of this thesis. These experiences were reflected upon as I attempted to explain what occurred and why, giving consideration to aspects that would improve future learning experiences. The children's responses are a key component to this teaching report.

Chapter II

Literature Review

My beliefs in teaching children are grounded in the theories of educators described in the literature. From an historical perspective, there are various theories and philosophies that are relevant to my research from both the fields of Art Education and Early Childhood Education. The theories I respect most tend to be those which regard the child as an active learner, an individual with his or her own ideas, one who experiences growth in an environment which supports all aspects of his or her development.

In learning to create my own art program for middle childhood art education, I was most influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach which embraces the constructivist theory of learning, that is the belief that people learn through experience. For Reggio Emilia, children are recognized as having an innate desire to understand their world and learn best by constructing their knowledge through meaningful learning experiences in which they are active participants. Based on the theories of Froebel, Dewey, Piaget and other educational innovators who have influenced the field of Early Childhood Education, the schools of Reggio Emilia have had tremendous success putting their philosophy into practice. In his foreword for *The Hundred Languages of Children* (1993), Howard Gardner writes that "Reggio epitomizes for me, an education that is effective and humane; its students undergo a sustained apprenticeship of

humanity, one that may last a lifetime” (p.xviii). Through various essays, the book explains the philosophy and practice of the school, its evolution, challenges and successes. In *The Spirit of the Studio* (2004), the Reggio Emilia environment is referred to as the third teacher- a distinctive feature of Reggio schools.

Malaguzzi compares the environment to an aquarium, reflecting the ideas, ethics, attitudes and life-styles of the people who live in it. The art studio, or atelier, is the centre of learning and the curriculum is one which is negotiated, meaning that the educators base teaching on the interests of the children. There is much written in the literature to support the ideology and practices of Reggio Emilia. Carol Seefeldt (1995); Patricia Tarr (2001); Nadine Kalin & Sylvia Kind (2005) describe the merits of the atelier, including its benefits to physical, social and emotional growth, as well as suggesting that art is a reflection of a child's cognitive development. *Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the classroom* (Fraser, 2006) fully explains the theories behind Reggio Emilia and offers teachers practical solutions for applying these elements to their own classrooms. Importantly, Reggio Emilia offers children the opportunity to express themselves through art experiences with a constructivist approach to learning.

In creating art lessons in which the child is considered to be an active participant in the learning process, it is necessary to fully understand the developmental needs of the child. Child development theorists have explained that children go through the various stages of development sequentially, though not necessarily at the same rate as their peers. Understanding the development of the child is

key to providing learning experiences which invite success. Theories of child development and education, as well as their practical application, are described in *Psychology Applied to Teaching* (Biehler & Snowman, 1986). Erikson's theories of psychosocial development describe children from the ages of 6 to 11 as experiencing the stage of "Industry vs. Inferiority". At this stage of development, behaviour is dominated by intellectual curiosity and performance. The danger at this stage is that children may feel inadequacy if their efforts are not recognized (Biehler and Snowman, p.45). Cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget, described 7 to 11-year-olds as being at the Concrete Operational Stage, characterized by their ability to solve problems by generalizing from their concrete experiences. Children at this stage are not yet able to think in abstract terms. Unstructured aspects of learning experiences which have opportunities for exploration and discovery, allow for experimentation, creativity and problem-solving to occur, are respectful of individual levels of development and abilities (Biehler & Snowman, 1986). In *Psychology in Teaching, Learning and Growth* (1990), Hamacheck defines the basic characteristics of development, with an overview of the outcomes and implications of these characteristics with regards to learning. Of particular interest to my study, Biehler & Snowman, and Hamacheck have provided descriptions of "humanistic approaches" to education as well as their practical applications for teaching. Included in the theories of humanistic psychologists Maslow, Rogers, Combs, Gordon and Purkey, are the overall assumptions about students and the basic nature of education, which include: teachers should prize students, how students feel about themselves

influences the way they learn, teachers should do everything possible to encourage students to develop positive self-esteem, and affective factors should be explored as much as the cognitive side of subject matter (Biehler & Snowman, 1986). My intention has been to create an environment in my own art practice which respects the developmental needs of the child and one which reflects the values attributed to the humanistic psychologists.

In creating an art program for children in the early years of middle childhood, it is necessary to understand the theories of artistic development which are relevant to this age group. For my own work, the most significant sources of research are found in *Child Development in Art* (1997) edited by Anna Kindler. In particular is the chapter by Jessica Hoffman Davis in which she explains the development of the U-curve in graphic symbolization. Davis's most recent work, *Framing Education as Art* (2005), explains the development of the U-Curve as she shares her insight with regards to the implications this has for art education in both school and in the community. To better understand the significance of this research, one must understand its evolution. Since the late 1960s, researchers have become interested in studying children's cognitive and artistic development. In 1968, Nelson Goodman founded Harvard Project Zero a research centre dedicated to this particular area of study. Senior researchers, including Howard Gardner, had been interested in a theory of artistic development referred to as "the U-shape" or "U-curve". Jessica Hoffman Davis,

who has done extensive research on this phenomenon (Davis, 1992; Davis & Gardner;1992,1993), explains that:

the U was configured such that the envied expressive work of the very young child was situated on one high end of the U, the flourishing deliberate work of the professional artist on the other. In the centre at the bottom were situated the less expressive drawings of children in middle childhood.” (Davis, 2005, p.66)

Children at this stage appeared to lose the exciting, expressive elements of artmaking while they concerned themselves with more realistic, peer-oriented drawings. This stage has been referred to as the “literal age” (Gardner & Winner, 1982; Rosenblatt & Winner,1988). In *Giftedness vs. Creativity in the Visual Arts* (1999), Winner described the U-shape as not being quite accurate since the upswing of the U only occurs in those who go on to have special ability in the arts. She argues that skills increase with age, therefore the concern should be not with drawing ability but with the loss of playfulness and creativity in middle childhood artmaking (p.14). Another consideration is that the U-shape pattern may only be reflective of the aesthetic qualities admired by contemporary western culture (Winner, 1999, p.17).

There are many other sources of information which have served me in my own research, including those which provide an historical perspective and have influenced by own thinking. 1904, *Friedrich Froebel 's Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* described his own method of teaching based on the principles of play. He called his school Kindergarten, meaning a “garden of children” in which the teacher plays the role of gardener, providing the proper conditions for growth. In *A History of Art Education*, Arthur Efland described Froebel's emphasis on

play, suggesting that it provided self-expression, which foreshadowed the movement towards self-expression in the twentieth century. Also relevant to my research is Froebel's belief that development requires active processes, and that specific areas of development are just the parts that make up the whole.

With his belief that learning in the classroom should be relevant to living in the real world, the philosophy of John Dewey has had a lasting effect on education. *The School and Society (1900/1956)*, provides descriptions of Dewey 's ideals for teaching children, which includes active inquiry, sharing of effort, and experiences in decision-making. *Experience and Education (1938)*, describes the importance Dewey placed on the teacher as a thinking and caring individual who values these very qualities in each student. The statement "education is not an affair of being told, but an active and constructive process" (p.44), inspires my own values in teaching children. Simpson, Jackson & Aycock, in *John Dewey and the Art of Teaching: Toward reflective and imaginative practice (2005)*, provide a practical approach to applying Deweyan theory in the classroom today, describing the various roles of the teacher and encouraging teachers to reflect on their experiences in the classroom, with the goal of becoming better educators.

The Art Educators of the 1930s and 1940s viewed artistic expression as important to the psychological development of the child. These educators were artists themselves, who created a pedagogy for teaching art to children. This ideology became known as creative self-expression, which placed value on the

child as an artist, who was believed to have an innate desire for expression. There was not, however, a firm belief amongst these practitioners, on how to provide “hands-off” instruction (Efland,1990). With relevance to my own philosophy, Natalie Cole in particular believed that it was necessary to motivate children through discussions, and she based the theme of her art lessons on children’s actual experiences. What I appreciate most from her book *The Arts in the Classroom*, is her belief that the child is full of ideas and that the teacher’s job is to provide encouragement. “The moment the teacher draws on the board or paints on the paper, that moment is the child crippled and inhibited” (1940, p.5). After World War II, social concerns became the priority in education, and in the case of Viktor Lowenfeld, war experiences directly impacted his educational beliefs about free expression and the healthy development of the child. In *Creative and Mental Growth* (1967), Lowenfeld and Brittain described a developmental basis for understanding children's art which helped teachers enormously in their expectations of what children might accomplish at each stage. With relevance to my own study is the description of children between the ages of 7 to 9, experiencing a period in artistic development referred to as the “schematic stage”, in which the child, after much experimentation, wants to make recognizable symbols, or schemas, of what he knows. The child at this stage is structuring his environment so that he can see relationships in his thinking processes (Lowenfeld & Brittain,1967). “Abstract thinking is based entirely upon symbols, and during this stage of development we can see the child’s first steps toward structuring and organizing his environment” (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1967,

p.180). Of particular relevance to my own practice is Lowenfeld's insistence that the art program for this age group should emphasize differences and praise experimentation.

It is necessary to consider the literature on community-based art programs when creating a program for this type of teaching environment. Both formal and informal settings can be places where opportunities to learn are based on the learner's interests, where education includes discovery or construction of meaning, and where students take responsibility for their own activities (Hein,1998, p.7). In *Step Outside: Community-based art education*, Peter London (1994) described the benefits of community-based art education, and the resources which the school environment tends to ignore, namely the children's actual lived experiences. Janette Hagggar (2000), examined the role of the community art educator and noted that "involvement in the arts personally, professionally and academically is an elemental criteria for teaching art in the community" (p.51). Davis described community art centres as having a strong knowledge of the community in order to meet their needs and interests. "Effective community arts centers attend scrupulously to their own process of development and transformation, the purpose of that ongoing and active process of self-reflection" (2005, p.211).

Fowler (1986) and Oddleifson (1994) in Hagggar (2000), described the devaluation of the arts in education in particular, and attributed this to having

been a reason for teaching art outside of school. McFee (1961), Belenkey (1997), and Haggar (2000) appreciated the benefits of the small student-teacher ratios, for which informal education allows. The result of this is a student-centred approach, fulfilling one of my main objectives for teaching of engaging fully in responding to the needs of my students. Through action research and reflective practice I have created a program which respects the whole child and through artmaking, helps them find their own voice. As an educator, this is my goal whether I am teaching in a community or a school environment.

With regards to the practical side of teaching art, the most significant sources of research in the literature included *Art and Experience* (1983) in which Nancy Smith provides practical suggestions for artmaking experiences with appropriate responses to these experiences, which are specifically geared to children of each age group. In *Encouraging Creativity in Art Lessons* (1988) and *How Children Make Art* (2006), George Szekley shares his experience in teaching art to children in both formal and informal settings. His approach encourages students to “try on the role of artist ” to experience the same creative processes which contemporary artists experience. He explains that art is always changing, and therefore teachers need to change their teaching strategies to suit the times. In addition to offering teaching strategies which develop creativity, Szekely explains both the benefits of motivating students to think through their own ideas, and the limitations of simply following teacher instructions. Szekely is an art educator who provides exciting, motivational strategies and creative art lessons

which focus on the process of artmaking. In *Encouraging Creativity in Art Lessons* (1988), he states that “the truly successful art lesson is one that inspires students to make their own artistic explorations...and to begin to think and act like artists in their daily lives” (p.20). As an important aspect of the artmaking experience, Szekely (1988) and Lund (1994) consider sketchbooks to be a place for children to enter the artmaking process with purpose. Sketchbooks or “idea-keepers” can be used with children to emphasize thinking and learning processes, rather than isolating this type of work. Children use these books to collect ideas and images, to document and to speculate, and to organize their ideas and their work (Lund,1994). In *Supporting Young Artists* Epstein & Tremis (2002) provide particularly useful strategies for teachers to support various aspects of art, based on a comprehensive approach to child development. In *Self-Expression Through Art* (1951), Elizabeth Harrison had wisely acknowledged that there was no formula to teaching art. She explained that teachers must work through their problems, adjusting their methods to suit the situation and the student. In supporting the notion that artmaking is a valuable tool for self-expression, Harrison believed that self-expression could not be taught, but only encouraged. Through practical suggestions for creating an atmosphere in the art room that would foster creativity and self-expression, the implication was that children would gain self-confidence as their own ideas were valued.

Finally, with regards to program planning, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggested that curriculum means different things to different people, with the belief that what is taught and how it is presented is determined by what matters to the teacher responsible. Teachers must think philosophically about education so that their program reflects their values. Miller (1983), described specific orientations and metaorientations which would link curriculum practice with philosophical, psychological, and social contexts generally adhered to by educators. Miller and Seller (1990) described curriculum as an ongoing process, which would stress the importance of meaning, purpose, and experience. Insight was offered with regards to the complex thinking and the personal reflections necessary to developing, implementing and evaluating an educational program.

These are the references in the literature which most influence my philosophy for teaching children and for the practical application of these theories in my own teaching practice with children in middle childhood art classes.

Chapter III

Methodology

In this thesis, my research has been of a qualitative nature, which according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), occurs when “ the natural setting is used as the direct source of data which is collected on the premises by the researcher, who assumes that human behaviour is contextual ”(p.27). I found this approach to be useful for my research since there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences when one is interacting with others; there is very much a social context to this work. Also, knowledge was constructed from multiple sources, such as transcripts from conversations during art classes, idea books, photographs and videotapes as well as field notes and personal narratives. The research for this thesis took place in my art studio, teaching children in my community and reflecting on my experiences as an art teacher in private practice. There were unique advantages to this teaching situation such as having had the opportunity to implement my own curriculum, and to test various teaching strategies in a setting that I had created.

The role of teacher as researcher required that I put myself in ‘the thick of things’, participating in the event and then reflecting on the experience and recording my thoughts in a journal-like format. In addition to the written record of my journal,

the art lessons and the children's responses were videotaped to assist me in acquiring a more objective view of what occurred in the teaching situation. The disadvantage of this method of research is that as a participant, I was not able to separate myself from the research and therefore, was challenged by personal biases. Both reflective practice and action research are considered to be critical dimensions of the professional development of teachers, with reflection specifically, being considered as a process that is central to developing practices (Leitch & Day, 2002, p.179). Dewey defined reflective thinking as a number of phases in thinking, followed by an act of searching or inquiring to find material that will resolve doubt (Dewey, 1944, p.12). In the article *Action Research and Reflective Practice: Towards a holistic view* (Leitch & Day, 2000), reflection was defined as "the deliberate and purposeful act of thinking which centres on ways of responding to problem situations "(p.179). More specifically:

reflective practice entails making conscious and explicit the dynamic interplay between thinking and action, so that teachers may become thoughtful and learn from their work in the light of purposes and principles, which are moral. Dewey considered reflective practice as having a moral base, where professional actions would be treated as experimental, and the individual would reflect both on their actions and their consequences" (Leitch & Day, 2000, p.181).

As a reflective practitioner in this research project, my concern was not only to improve my practice and gain additional competence in art teaching, but to also live my values more fully. By engaging in reflective practice, my goal was to gain greater knowledge about myself and to challenge myself so that I would be better able to meet the needs of my students.

Action research is “ the study and enhancement of one’s own practice ” (May, 1993, p.118). Through action research, I constructed knowledge from my teaching practice, by planning and implementing art activities for children and then reflecting on those experiences. To be reflective means to consult with oneself. Through reflective research, I recorded my opinions and observations from each teaching session. In doing so, I took into consideration my prior expectations and objectives for the event and compared them to what actually occurred. The responses of the children were considered as was the artwork which was produced during the art lessons. The formula for my research consisted of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

Treatment of the Data

Before proceeding with the gathering of data, I had obtained the consent of the parents of the children participating in this study. My ‘group of seven’ consisted of one boy and six girls, ranging in age from seven to nine. They had been attending my art classes for over a year, thereby establishing a relationship among the participants. In my teaching practice, art classes are presented as a session of five classes, held every Saturday for five consecutive weeks.

Students commit to one session at a time. Each session usually focuses on one theme throughout the five-week period. For this research project, I had extended the teaching time from the usual one hour to two hours, to ensure adequate response time.

Multiple methods for collecting data were used in order to validate the qualitative research involved in this study. These methods included: A journal / artist's book for my ideas, plans and reflections, sketchbooks / idea-books for the children's own purposes, audio / videotaping of art lessons and response discussions with the children, and digital photographs of the work in progress as well as the finished work.

My data collecting journal was used to record my ideas for art lessons with regards to both the organization of the lessons as well as the teaching concepts I expected to convey. In this journal, I also recorded what actually happened during the art lessons and my reflections upon these experiences. The students' idea-books were used to encourage children to value their own ideas and expressions. Each student was asked to keep an ongoing record of such things as their ideas for art projects through drawings and words, the materials they would need, the colours they like to use, and samples of their experimentation with materials. The purpose of these books was to provide a place for children to build upon their ideas for various art projects. These books also provided evidence for the development of artistic growth throughout the series of art lessons.

As an active participant in this research study, it was difficult for me to observe the children freely during the art sessions. I took photographs of the children while they were working and of the completed work when it was displayed. For a

more complete perspective of the teaching experience, I audiotaped each art session while it was in progress. When circumstances allowed for it, I informally videotaped the children while they were working or during their responses.

Following each session, I made written comments in my journal describing, as objectively as possible, what occurred during the art lesson. Consideration was given to the structure and organization of the lesson, the elements involved in the creative process, the use of instruction and techniques, the students' actions and reactions, as well as their responses. Under the heading *Personal Narrative of my Reflections of the Experience*, I attempted to explain what occurred and why following each art lesson, as I gave consideration to aspects which might improve future learning experiences. Upon completion of the art lessons, an analysis of collected data was undertaken; the journal, idea-books, audio and videotapes reviewed. The finished work was photographed and the children's responses were transcribed. Reviewing this assemblage of material allowed me the opportunity to examine my role as an art educator in an informal educational setting, determined what the participants had gained from this experience, and drew conclusions for future pedagogical practice.

Chapter IV

Addressing the U-Curve Phenomenon

Project Zero's early research examined the graphic symbols of drawing as one of the systems of symbols in which people process information. Research into children's construction of knowledge led to recognition of the similarities between the artwork of young children and that of adult artists, using the same aesthetic criteria which included balance, line and repletteness. In that study, a paradox between production and perception was noticed:

At the same time that children's own production of art work is declining in such aesthetic dimensions as balance and expression (in the period of middle childhood deemed the literal stage) children's perception of these aesthetic properties seems to be on the rise (Davis, cited in Kindler (Ed), 1997, p.48).

Even though the flavourful and expressive qualities of their earlier art work declines, children in middle childhood begin to become aware of the aesthetically appealing qualities in the drawings of others: "Although the child's own drawings appear to be fragmented, the child is now able to recognize unity or balance in the drawings of others" (Davis cited in Kindler (Ed), 1997, p.48).

In my own research, I have discovered the importance of introducing elements of art appreciation during the designated response time in my art lessons with 7 to 9 year-olds. Since children at this stage of development were able to recognize aesthetic elements in the artwork of others, valuable insight was gained through

exposure to other artists' work, and through discussions of these works. By introducing children to the work of other artists in both an historical and contemporary context, I was able to increase awareness for aesthetic properties, discuss meaning and purpose as part of the artistic process, as well as support originality - a key element of contemporary art. In my experience, exposure to other artists and to a variety of types of artwork was greeted enthusiastically by children at this stage, as noted in my chapter on children's responses. It became possible for the pressures of conformity and achieving realism in artwork to be alleviated as children became aware of the unending possibilities in creating art. What they learn through art appreciation and response time, lends strength to their own beliefs and opinions and stimulates thinking for future artmaking experiences:

When we level the playing field between artist and child, between producer and perceiver, between meaning maker through image and meaning maker through words, we make real and tangible the conversation through art that artists and viewers of art have perpetuated across time and circumstance and culture. If we value this conversation in and of itself, we need to be sure that all our children at every juncture in their development have sufficient art instruction to learn and use the vocabularies of art. Only then will the conversation be perpetuated and extended across more voices than those of the talented and specially trained.
(Davis, 2005, p.78-79)

To level the playing field does not mean that children's artwork is equal to the artwork of the professional artist, but there are many benefits to be gained by making connections between the two. Children in middle childhood are distracted by the details in their artwork, viewing their own art in parts rather than as an artwork in its entirety. Artistically, they tend to be fixated on achieving

realism in their work and in conforming to peer-oriented images. Davis (2005) noted that in studies of teachers' responses to children's artwork, classroom teachers celebrated the push toward realistic portrayal in the drawings of middle childhood. "The 9-year-old who has mastered the perfect schema for a popular icon like Mickey Mouse is likely to find greater recognition in the classroom than the child who is covered with charcoal as he explores light and dark..." (p.70). In my own teaching practice, I had witnessed two extremes within this phenomenon. There was the child who had perfected 'the cute doggie' drawing, (a peer-accepted, cartoonish portrayal of a dog) and could not seem to draw anything else. No matter how many photographs of dogs I put in front of her, no matter what instruction I gave her, the results were the same: she drew the cute doggie. It was intriguing as an observer to see such resistance. But more often, I have observed children who seem to experience extreme discomfort throughout instructor-led drawing exercises. As they perceive that their inadequacies are being focussed upon, their confidence plummets. I had intuitively recognized that most children at this stage would not be likely to pursue an interest in art if this were their only experience of it.

The U-curve phenomenon is somewhat misleading since most people never get out of the trough of the U. Few children go on to develop the advanced pictorial skills which define the upswing of the U configuration. Emiel Reith (1997), in his research on pictorial representations, recognized that representational drawing is

about the unique relationship between form and content and involves complex thinking processes. According to Reith, art educators should engage children in activities which facilitate awareness of the some of the aspects of representational drawing, suggesting that teachers discuss differences and similarities between features of objects and pictures, and to encourage children to verbalize their intentions and procedures while they are engaged in drawing (Reith in Kindler (Ed), 1997, p.76). In my own research, as noted in my lesson on drawing, exercises which develop drawing skills but do not focus on achieving a photographic likeness, were successful with this age group because the students were learning new skills without the pressure of having to produce a realistic image.

Davis (2005), described an earlier experience as an art teacher, in which she discovered that children at this stage could overcome the rigidity of their drawings when engaged in drawing exercises which took away the pressure of achieving realism. This led her to believe that teachers could help reverse the perceived cycle of loss with children at this stage development:

I noted that when children at the “part over whole” stage drew as I asked to with the wrong hand, their drawings became freer. When they sat across from one another at a long table and drew each other’s faces without looking at the paper, their drawings had the sophistication and piquancy of drawings from the New Yorker magazine. Indeed, when I mounted these sketches on simple black mats for exhibit, their parents could not believe what they saw. Where were the schema-driven flowers and boats? (p. 69)

With regards to art education, Davis suggests that school age children should be taught art instruction alongside other subjects in school, so that these children have the opportunity for artistic growth and to keep them producing through the various stages of artistic development. She also wonders if this would help avoid sacrificing the 'joy of creation'. Davis also reports that "in most schools, the provision of arts education decreases in inverse proportion to children's readiness to explore media with maturity and purpose" (p.70). With regards to the U-curve phenomenon, it is my own belief that art educators, both in the community and in school, should keep children producing art, to persevere through this stage in order to carry them through to the upswing of the U. In this teaching project, I was able to address this concern by providing a variety of art experiences which supported and nurtured children's efforts by giving value to their own ideas and expressions in artmaking. It is my belief that children will pursue the arts if their experiences at this critical stage of artistic development are positive, confidence-building, and alleviate the pressure from having to achieve photographic realism, by focussing on other aspects of art. Davis (2005) suggests:

It is only when we keep producing art on the other side of the trough of the 'U' that we can consider the period one of expanding repertoire. Should not all children have the chance to continue their growth as meaning-makers in the various media of art?
(p.70)

Drawing is a technical skill that improves over time through practice, perseverance and through the cognitive development which makes it possible to understand the complexities involved in pictorial representation. Only the few

who are considered to be artistically gifted can achieve such abilities in childhood. Ellen Winner, who has studied artistic giftedness, puts this into perspective within the context of contemporary art values. Winner, (1999) in her study on creativity and giftedness provided this insight which has relevance to my own beliefs:

No child, no matter how gifted in art, will become a domain creative adult artist unless he or she can go beyond what has already been done. Child prodigies have to reinvent themselves. What they have is technical mastery and facility; but they have to have more than this to make the field notice them. If Picasso had never gone beyond his precocious realism, he would never have been noticed, for the art world had already seen extreme realism. In today's abstract, conceptual, minimalist art world, it does not seem that traditional drawing skills play any role at all. (p.28)

The U-curve of artistic development may not appear to be in line with Piaget's structure of the hierarchial progression of cognitive development. The young child seems capable of producing drawings similar to the work of professional artists, yet these expressive abilities tend to decline in middle childhood. There are several considerations to be made in support of Piaget's stages of cognitive development and the U-curve phenomenon. Firstly, the preference for the expressiveness found in young children's drawings, appeals to the aesthetic qualities valued in western and modernist civilization (Gardner, 1980; Winner, 1999; Davis, 1997, 2005). In other cultures and in another historical context, realism would be valued over expressiveness, therefore demonstrating the hierarchy of cognitive development to be true. Secondly, the thought processes of young children's work are operating at the "Pre-operational Stage", in which

children are able to focus on only one quality at a time, and are cognitively unable to reverse their actions (Biehler & Snowman, 1986). They are not concerned with the rules of drawing because they are not yet aware of them. Their artwork is expressive and unconventional because they are exploring and playing with the medium and the images they create, unaware of what things 'should' be. Children at the "Concrete Operational Stage" are usually capable of mentally reversing actions, but their thinking is limited to concrete experiences. Winner (1999), suggests that the hierarchy of cognitive development is evident in children's artwork:

(Pre-school) children are not concerned with following rules of drawing, because they have not yet mastered the rules. Thus, they do not draw realistically (indeed, they cannot), they do not use colour conventionally (suns may be purple, or green), and they do not anchor their figures along a ground line that respects gravity. Instead, they draw fancifully and non-realistically...As they approach middle childhood, say around seven, they begin to draw less, and their drawings no longer have the aesthetic appeal of those produced a few years earlier....Children at this age seem dominated by one goal- to draw things the they way they look, or perhaps the way they look in pictures. Although their drawings are more accurate, they are less pleasing and seem less creative. (p.13)

The perceived loss of expressiveness in the drawings of middle childhood is not contrary to Piaget's theory of cognitive development since he addresses the phenomenon of regression that can occur at each stage. Such regression is temporary, and results from the child's concentration on other skills and concepts. While the middle childhood artist attends to the details of his picture, he temporarily loses sight of the overall vitality and expressiveness which

characterized his earlier work. In my past experiences as an Early Childhood Educator, I had often observed that children who were learning how to write the letters of the alphabet, could no longer recall their knowledge of colours. This loss of knowledge was temporary, and was quickly retrieved when children were no longer concentrating so heavily on letter-making. Throughout the art lessons for this teaching report, I observed that children between the ages of 7 and 9 were able to set aside their need for realism and conformity and could once again achieve the energetic expressiveness of their earlier work, when they were encouraged to attend to other aspects of artmaking, such as exploration of new materials or techniques.

Davis (2005) explains how the U-shape of development in cognitive and behavioural functions is not uncommon:

Think of the way that a young baby may seem to “stand up” on your lap months before he has figured out how to sit or crawl. U-shaped development is usually marked by three phases, in which: (1) the behaviour appears, (2) it apparently disappears, and (3) it reappears (Bever, 1982; Strauss, 1982). For the majority of us, it would seem U-shaped development in drawing is not completed. That early gift or penchant for powerful mark-making disappears, as Picasso suggested, “without a trace” only to be reclaimed by the very few of us who decide or discover that we are artists.
(p.70)

Researchers such as Dennis Palmer Wolf perceive this period of artistic development not as a loss but as an advancement. Stereotypical representations in drawing and an increasing repertoire of schemas, shows a preference for the literal rather than the interpretative, marking an increase in

cognitive abilities (Wolf & Perry, 1988; Duncum, 1986). Davis (1997, 2005) clarifies that the loss she refers to when describing the U-curve phenomenon is the absence of the artistry of early childhood, the “gifts pre-school children bear, such as the ability to produce an expressive and balanced drawing” (p. 54). She recognizes that there are gains made at this period of development, but her concern is that very few persevere through the challenges of the literal stage. With relevance to my own work, I share with Davis a concern for “the lack of continued artistic training to develop these early skills, which represents a devaluation of both the pre-school child’s state of knowing and the cognitive area of artistic expression” (p.54).

The U-curve phenomenon illustrates the need for art educators to create pedagogy that supports artistic growth for children in the trough of the U. Through my research, I have come to believe that children will persevere through this challenging period of artistic development when the pressure for conformity and product orientation is minimized. Through artmaking experiences which encourage children to value their own ideas and expressions, I have seen children gain confidence in their artistic abilities. This implies that with such artmaking experiences, children are more likely to develop a life-long appreciation for art. In turn, this makes the upswing of the U attainable for more than just the few.

Chapter V

Profile of the 7 to 9-Year-Old

In providing a holistic art education curriculum for children in middle childhood, it is important to understand the developmental abilities and needs of these children to better support their growth both artistically and as a whole. Children in this age group are physically active and it is difficult for them to sit quietly for long periods of time. At the same time, they become fatigued easily as a result of physical and mental exertion (Biehler & Snowman, 1986, p.36). Throughout the two hour art lessons of my teaching practice, children had opportunities to rest while we discussed instructions, responded to artwork, read a story, or worked on the idea-books. Otherwise, children spent the majority of the time standing while they worked at the art tables. At this age, large-muscle control is still superior to fine-motor co-ordination. Art experiences enhance the development of fine-motor skills as children have the opportunity to work with a wide variety of materials including paint brushes of various sizes, pencils, scissors, pastels and much more.

Socially, children at this age range are somewhat selective in their choices of friends. They may cultivate close friendships while openly excluding others from the group (Biehler & Snowman, 1986, p.45). In the community of the art studio, it is important that all children feel a sense of belonging and should be recognized as sharing an interest in art, the commonality which brings them together.

Children at this stage of socio-emotional development are eager to please and enjoy responsibility. The art studio is a place where children learn skills and become self-sufficient at many tasks. For example in my painting lesson, each child was given the responsibility of caring for his own work station, having to pour paints, clean brushes, and wipe up spills. A spirit of co-operation prevailed, as children helped one another to learn new skills.

Children are sensitive to criticism and ridicule and may have difficulty adjusting if they experience failure in an unsupportive atmosphere. In this period of socio-emotional development which psychologist Erik Erickson has labelled "Industry vs. Inferiority" children must have opportunities to try new things, to be recognized for their efforts and to experience success. According to Erikson, a child who hears constant criticism, or who is discouraged from trying, will experience a feeling of inferiority which will hamper or delay his sense of industry (Biehler & Snowman, 1986, p.43). Children at this stage are also becoming aware of the feelings of others and this sensitivity must be encouraged through positive experiences in the classroom or studio. Throughout the art lessons I offered, children were encouraged to express their feelings and opinions in an environment that supported self-expression both verbally and artistically.

In order for teachers to provide effective learning opportunities that best suit children's interests and abilities, the intellectual development of the child should be considered. Cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget's stage theory of

development regards development as an evolutionary process. Each child goes through certain stages at his own rate of progress, but the stages are completed in a sequential order. 7 to 9-year-olds are at the "Concrete Operational" stage, in which they typically solve problems and gain knowledge by generalizing from their concrete experiences. Piaget combined biology and knowledge in his concept of intellectual development, while he recognized that humans have tendencies to organize and adapt. We maintain a state of balance by trying to understand the inconsistencies we experience. Children do this through a process of assimilation and accommodation of schemes. Schemes are organized patterns of thought or behaviour, and each new experience causes the existing scheme to be revised (Biehler & Snowman, 1986, p.58-62). This was evident in my art lessons when children were introduced to printmaking as a form of art. Through this experience, their existing knowledge of art was revised and adapted to include printmaking. With more exposure to different techniques and media, children changed their existing scheme to accommodate new knowledge about artmaking.

Since the development of children at this stage requires that learning be based on concrete experiences, it is imperative that art experiences include opportunities for exploration, discovery, experimentation, and problem-solving. At the same time, art experiences must be respectful of individual levels of development and abilities. Typically, children at this stage are eager to learn and are willing participants. They also have a great facility for speech and must be

given opportunities to share their ideas. Understanding the cognitive traits of the 7 to 9-year-old is essential for choosing age-appropriate teaching strategies and content for art lessons. Luehrman & Unrath (2006) describe the need for art teachers to apply developmental theory to children's artmaking activities:

Very few studies that look at practice, either explicitly or implicitly begin by staking out the developmental needs of the youngsters who are their subjects; nor do they set their subjects in the context of the classroom or their out-of-school lives. Instruction, thus, emerges as a set of activities involving the arts that are applied to young people, rather than engaging them at their own level and on their own terms. (p.6)

In creating a holistic program for art education in middle childhood, I consistently applied child development theories to the lessons I had planned and implemented, in order to meet my overall objective of helping children gain confidence in their artistic abilities as they learn to value their own ideas and expressions in art.

Researchers who had studied the U-curve phenomenon of artistic development were interested in the link between cognitive and artistic development. Artistic behaviour such as drawing, provided evidence of how children think and what children do as they progress through stages of development. Art educators are increasingly considering a more holistic view of development when reinterpreting theories of artistic development, such as those proposed by Lowenfeld (1952), Kellogg (1970), and Gardner (1980). In addition to the recognition of artistic and cognitive development, theorists today also give consideration to social, physical, emotional, cultural influences. Marianne Kerlavage (1998) and Anna Kindler (1997, 2004) described the contextual factors that need to be accounted for

when explaining the artistic development of children. In Simpson & Delaney (1998), teachers are encouraged to look at the visual work of children with regard not only to artistic development alone, but to also note influences or interactions between artistic development and other areas of development. With the understanding that children are unique individuals, “stage theories are generalizations meant to be descriptive of tendencies among groups of children...concepts should not be rigidly interpreted, but rather flexibly referenced as a general guide” (Luehrman & Unrath, 2006, p. 8). An understanding of the development of the whole child better equips a teacher to provide meaningful learning experiences in which students are more likely to experience growth as their needs, abilities and interests are considered.

Chapter VI

The Art Lessons

Painting

In the first lesson, children were given the opportunity to express themselves freely in an open-ended activity of painting on paper. Each child was given a work space equipped with 12 brushes of various sizes, a water can, large-format paper, and an empty carton to fill with their own choices of paint colours. The children were encouraged to paint any subject in any style, but to take their time and to enjoy the process. They were also given the responsibility of caring for their own 'work station', ensuring that their space was free of clutter and that their art materials were cared for. The structure of this activity was limited only to the medium I had chosen for them to work with. The children had freedom in choosing the colours of paints and mixing new colours if they chose to. I provided instruction on how to use the paints and brushes, how to pour paints and mix colours, and how to keep colours 'clean'. My educational goals for this lesson included the following: To promote creativity and self-expression, to have opportunities for exploration of materials and techniques, to co-operate with others and to take responsibility and show initiative.

Personal Narrative Reflecting on the Experience

Three out of seven kids were absent today but as it turned out, that was a blessing because we were working on free-style, large format paintings and there were some temptations for being silly. Seven would have more challenging to

manage. However, I am sorry they missed out on this exercise because everyone enjoyed it and free-painting experiences are hard to come – they really made a mess. As Julia put it “ my mom is glad we can paint at your house because she doesn’t want us to mess up ours”. They seemed to enjoy the responsibility of being in charge of their own paints- choosing, pouring, cleaning. There was a sense of ownership and respect for the materials, and overall it worked quite well. The kids were really relaxed painting and chit-chatting mostly about things other than art. I was hoping there would be more dialogue to echo their processes. Actually, if I recall my own studio experiences in high school and university, everyone chit-chats or works quietly. I had hoped that children would verbalize their inner dialogue as they worked, so that I could learn more about their thinking processes. Perhaps they would have if the lesson had been more specific and less open-ended. I am not sure if the second free-painting experience was necessary. Everyone got very “abstract” and were influenced by Tia, who wanted to do a Pollock-style splatter painting (which we had done in an art session last year). Perhaps the children were finished with the painting experience, and the second painting simply provided an outlet for letting loose. The first paintings were controlled and tight while the second ones got out of control and silly. Tia though, was interested in trying to control her technique and seemed to be enjoying the process. The others were copying her but with abandon, splattering past their own work and on to others, using up paints from the tray, even the muddy ones, instead of giving consideration to which colours they would like for the work. Denis actually started pouring his paints right on to

the paper as if he were just cleaning out the paint tray. Marley started out with a careful 'under the sea' subject then she tried to do the popular splatter painting, in which she had had no previous experience. She just couldn't get the technique, so she did brush dots instead and seemed pleased with those. On reflection, I realize some forms of guidance and instruction are important and necessary and so is organization! Even in an activity which values freedom and creativity, I constantly had to remind children about the task at hand, how to use the brushes, being respectful of others...Thank goodness I was organized for this- it could have been a disaster. It takes a certain maturity for kids to work on their own ideas and artwork independently within a group setting, and definitely a firm teacher. I was surprised they didn't make better use of the painting experience. More structure would have been helpful. I could have pushed them a little to get more out of the experience- yes, to produce better work. I admit it. I think more guidance would have been better- this was too open-ended, and if these had all been new students, I think this art lesson would have been a disaster. Because I have a relationship with these kids, they know I have boundaries and things never got out of control. But because I have a relationship with these children, I also had bigger expectations since I know what they can do, and the work today wasn't great. Admittedly, they had fun and that counts. No one seemed pressured. But were they happy with their results? They had little to say during the response session, so I am not sure. I know Tia was pleased with hers- she had a plan, she enjoyed the process, she challenged herself, she worked independently and she had two successful, finished

products. She also has a maturity beyond her years. Also interesting to note, Julia was absent today. These two are best friends and are somewhat competitive. Tia had a chance to shine today. Denis seemed unable to get what he wanted artistically, and the finished products were some of his weakest. But as an only child who has a highly structured life, this happy and social fellow, was thrilled with the opportunity to relax and do something in an unstructured environment, though he did tend to fly off course at times. Marley, who is socially shy and withdrawn and very difficult to get to know, actually has very strong ideas and opinions. It is only amongst people she trusts that she will express herself, so the environment I provide here is very important. She will not try things if she thinks she might fail. She said she wanted to paint her hero, Kelly Clarkson, but I think she knew that skill was beyond her and instead, painted crowns and hearts. Kaitlin was very happy painting her portrait of Curious George, and talked about her favourite episodes as she worked. She is so happy in this environment it is hard to believe she experiences anxiety at school and will not take any extra-curricular activities other than these art classes. She seems very pleased with the painting experience today and is very confident in her work.

In planning this painting lesson, I had considered some of Michelle Cassou's (2004) suggestions for painting experiences which emphasize process and creativity and which respect the child's individuality. I gave instruction for using the art materials and I gave them the opportunity to be responsible for them as well. In planning this lesson I had been inspired by Cassou's beliefs: "children

love to master the use of their tools. Good workmanship enhances and stimulates their power of expression” (p.180). “Children need to be told how to use tools in the best way. It creates order in the painting gesture, and out of that, creative energy is stimulated” (p.169). I had less success with her suggestions for motivation: “Questions should always be playful and full of enthusiasm about the possible outcome. We could, for instance, ask with excitement: what would you do if you could paint absolutely anything in the whole world, without worrying? If you could really do anything? What could you paint if you could paint slowly and with care? These types of questions encourage children to feel without forcing them into a particular outcome. We offer a general direction, a vast space, but we are focussing on their feelings of the moment.” (p.168). In this painting lesson, I think children did what they wanted once they heard me say they could do whatever they wanted. I think the freedom and the paints were the motivation and anything I said after that didn’t really matter. Upon reflection, I think more instruction and direction would have produced better work for those who did not have a strong idea of what they wanted to accomplish. It is tricky territory- art that is based on the ideas of others lacks honesty. It is important that the subject matter to the artist, no matter what his age or experience is. I will try to encourage more thought in future painting experiences. Some of the children were successful and others were not. Nancy Smith suggests that children need time to reflect on events that are personally meaningful before they begin painting. She shares Dewey’s philosophy with these words: “It is important that subject matter for paintings be from life experiences of children and from

personal experience. To insure each child's involvement and success, teachers need to awaken and engage each child's ideas and feelings about experiences as a motivating force" (1983, p.65). My lesson was too open-ended for some children and I should have taken more time to engage them in the meaning of their work. I do not think it was a co-incidence that Kaitlin's work was satisfying in both process and product- she was very personally involved in the meaning of her work. The same can be said for Tia and her Remembrance Day field of poppies. Tia was personally involved in creating a beautiful painting for her grandfather who had told her stories about the war. Marley and Denis were not motivated by personal meaning and experiences, and they reverted back to their existing schemas of stick figures for Denis and princess symbols for Marley. As a result, their work wasn't very exciting or genuine, and they were not thrilled with the finished paintings although they did enjoy having the opportunity to paint.

Drawing and Printmaking

I responded to my concern over the lack of direction and instruction in the painting lesson by preparing a plan for two teacher-directed art experiences- the first one in drawing instruction and following that, a lesson in printmaking.

Meaning and original ideas were not emphasized in this lesson as I was examining the role of instruction and teacher-direction, as well as introducing other aspects of the artmaking experience. Importantly, I wanted to focus on the theory of the U-Curve and to observe what would happen in different drawing experiences. For the printmaking activity, my educational objectives included the

following: to provide a new art experience that would expand their repertoire of knowledge of artmaking, to provide an art experience that would require artmaking skills which do not require strong drawing skills, to introduce design concepts, to follow directions, and to improve fine motor skills while learning a new technique.

For the first drawing exercise children were asked to draw cats based on the examples I provided. This subject was based on a request from one of my students therefore, it was of personal interest to only one child in the group. In this exercise, children were given illustrations of cats to look at and to try to copy. They were asked to try to draw realistically, using the same materials as in the sample drawings.

The second part of the drawing lesson included a series of exercises, some of which were inspired by Davis's suggestions for drawing in her research on children at this stage of development. Here, the subject was chosen by the teacher and the instructions were specific and teacher-directed, but realism was not the expected outcome for this exercise.

In the printmaking portion of the lesson, children were given step-by-step instructions for creating a linoleum print. They were free to choose their own subject but were given suggestions for creating a design that would be suitable for this medium. They were required to follow very specific instructions in order

to provide for a safe learning experience and to experience success in both the process and the resulting product of the printmaking experience.

Personal Narrative Reflecting on the Experience

One of the children wanted to learn how to draw a cat, and I wanted to do a lesson on drawing instruction in order to experiment with the U-curve phenomenon. I took this opportunity to teach 'how to draw a cat' to everyone- it was not an option. What resulted from this first exercise, was that the child who originally wanted to draw a cat enjoyed doing the exercises, used the pictures I had provided of cats in various poses, and really worked at trying to get it right. She seemed completely content working through this process, and her efforts were confirmed when the other children complimented her on her drawings. They were genuine, and I don't often hear children voluntarily complimenting others on their work, usually because they are absorbed in their own work. I also had asked the children to try to draw using the different materials I had provided, namely pencil, charcoal, chalk pastels, and black marker. The resulting responses I heard included: "I can't do this", "this is no good", "This is ugly", and "I hate this". I witnessed one child asking another child to do his drawing for him! I saw two children laughing while turning their drawings into 'bad' drawings. I assume this was to compensate for feelings of inadequacy. There was a lot of 'fooling around' behaviour to avoid working altogether, and there were plenty of groans all around, while people worked. I was constantly asked for more paper to start again, even though I explained that making mistakes was part of the

process. I demonstrated how to draw lightly and keep reworking in your effort to get it right. Children insisted on erasing or throwing their papers in the garbage. I suggested that they keep all their efforts and glue them into their idea books to show the evolution of their drawing. Instead, I was told by Tia, "you can keep it. I don't want it." This is something I do not hear in my practice, usually children do not even wait until the paint is dry, as they are so excited to bring home their work. This exercise in drawing instruction was illuminating and confirmed my beliefs that children need to work from their own ideas and interests, that there should be choices available, and that drawing skills are developed with time and practice. At this stage of artistic development, emphasizing realistic drawing skills with specific expectations, turns creative and confident artists into unhappy, self-critical, defeated non-artists. If I continued to teach like this in my private practice, I could conceivably lose my students. If I taught like this in the school setting, it would be easy to evaluate children, but probably difficult to manage the classroom because children would not want to be there. Certainly, in either setting, the chances of continuing past this period in art would be diminished, as would any understanding of what art is. Who would want to persevere through this difficult period when art is reduced to skills and techniques instead of ideas and expressions?

In the second portion of the drawing lesson there were groans and grumbles until the children realized this would be a little more fun. I had planned for a series of drawing exercises including contour drawing, gesture drawing, wrong-hand

drawing and blind-folded drawing. Due to time constraints, we didn't complete all of these exercises. In this portion of the drawing lesson children were given specific instructions of what to do, how to do it, which subject to draw and which materials to use. Compared to the 'cat drawings' with regard to the process, the experiences and responses of the children, and even the finished products, the results were very different. There was a high level of teacher-direction in this activity but the focus was not on achieving realism this time. The outcome was interesting: products were aesthetically more pleasing than the realistic drawings of the cat, in most instances. Some of the children added text, perhaps as an explanation for the lack of realism. The greatest difference was in their attitude and approach to the exercises. They all enjoyed drawing when there was no pressure for realism to be achieved. In the 'cat drawing' only Kaitlin was satisfied with her work. All the others seemed dejected at the lack of realism in their work. With the other drawing exercises, they were all satisfied with their efforts and seemed to enjoy themselves, accepting that it can be good without having to look real. Stephanie wrote: "I rite (write) with the left hand" on her wrong-hand drawing. She said she wrote that so that she would remember how she did the drawing. Tia wrote "drawing without lifting the pen" on her contour drawing. She said it explained why the drawing looked that way. The blind-folded drawing had the least expectations for finished products and the children seemed to enjoy this one most. Responses during the exercises included: "This is fun!" "This is my wrong-hand, but it's pretty good", and "I think this is really good and I didn't look when I drew it". I was impressed that they all tried to do it correctly- not worrying

about the results. In exercises such as contour drawing, children learn important aspects of drawing without having to experience feelings of inadequacy. They were asked to look at their subject and to draw what they saw, to note the details and to concentrate on that rather than on what they thought should be there.

Denis's observation was particularly amusing: "mine looks like a squirrel that fell out of a tree"! I said to him "you know that is interesting Denis, because your's does look like its moving". Nikki said "mine kinda looks different from the real one but I did it like I was supposed to" and Marley said " Mine looks like it has a mis-shapen head but it has all the details". I think the children are realizing that there is more to art than just drawing realistically.

With regards to the printmaking lesson, the children were very interested in the linoleum work. For the most part, they understood the seriousness of working with these tools and were cautious and respectful of my instructions. No one got hurt! Denis almost did, but he was the only one being a little careless.

The exercise was time consuming and we didn't get to do as many colours and patterns as I would have liked to do. There are so many possibilities for future art activities with this medium! Even though there was significant step by step instruction in printmaking, the process was more important than the product. They enjoyed the almost ritualistic aspects of printmaking and seemed to enjoy the choosing their own subjects and working on the designs. It was difficult for some children to grasp the need for keeping their drawings simple and

uncluttered. Here's where those basic schemas come in handy! Sample of dialogue: "One snowman Denis, no fancy hills and skaters. Keep it simple. You have to be able to make a groove in every line of your drawing, or the print won't work." I had to help all the children, each at a different stage of the printmaking exercise. It is not always possible to be available to everyone, even in a small group such as this. One independent little girl- Stephanie, didn't ask for help and did all her printmaking alone while I was busy with others. Perhaps her prints would have been more successful as a finished product, had I been available to give her more guidance. When the teacher wears many hats, she doesn't always see everything that needs to be seen.

Miniatures, Textures, and Idea Books

In this lesson, I wanted to motivate the children to try new things in their artmaking and to value their own ideas and interests. I was inspired by George Skekely, whom I admire enormously for his ability to engage students in artmaking experiencing through enticing motivational strategies. My own strategy would involve sharing my personal collection of miniatures with the children. I would hold up one miniature object at a time and then pass each object around the table for children to examine while trying to discover what these objects would have in common. The purpose of this motivational strategy is to encourage divergent thinking skills as children problem-solve and ask questions. This strategy also provides an opportunity to further establish our group as a community; as I share an aspect of myself with the children I am encouraging

them to tell me about themselves. This strategy also provides an introduction to the concepts of the art activities to follow.

Miniature art works were made following a demonstration of creating textured patterns on paper using various found materials, such as netting, corrugated cardboard and bubble-wrap. Also demonstrated, was the use of oil and chalk pastels for this project. The children were asked to make their own miniature artworks on paper using the various materials provided, with the assumption that in their creations, they would attempt to use some of the techniques I had demonstrated, as well as experiment with their own.

Following the art activity, the Idea Books were distributed as I explained the purpose of them. The children were given three homework assignments to prepare for the following class: The first was to make a 'mystery texture' in the idea book, using a found object from home. The children would have to guess how the texture was made the following week. The second assignment was to write, draw, cut and paste pictures of "your favourite things", as the beginning of an on-going project. The third assignment was to think about ways to incorporate the theme of "favourite things" into a project that we would do together as a group.

Personal Narrative Reflecting on the Experience

The “miniatures” motivational strategy was very successful. The children were instantly captivated by the guessing game and the miniature objects themselves were greatly adored by the children. During this exercise I passed around the articles I had in a box which were miniatures of larger things they have seen before, such as a tiny Chiclets box, a bird, a paint box, etc. I asked the children to tell me what these objects had in common as they looked, examined, touched, and actively engaged their thinking skills. After several guesses, it was our youngest member who made the connection that they were “all tiny, real things”.

The art activity introduced children to working on a small scale and they really ‘went to town’ on this. They were inspired by the miniatures and by with all the lovely art supplies available to them, including the various small sizes and colours of paper. They were pleased that they were permitted to make as many as they wanted to. They started off experimenting with some of the techniques I had demonstrated for creating textures, which evolved into creating new patterns and combinations. I started displaying their work on the wall right away and then they took the initiative to stick up their work as they completed each one. One of the children found a way to make her miniature artwork “pop out” and the other children tried her technique. There was a lot of creativity and problem-solving going on.

Children were encouraged to work on their idea books when they had completed the miniatures. They started to discuss the final project and they wrote down

their ideas, the materials they would need, and sketched out how the final project might look. We shared ideas and tried to figure out how to come up with one project that everyone would agree upon. Skekely encourages teachers to include children in the creative process:

When teachers assume that students can make artworks simply by following instructions, they are forgetting how important thinking about art ideas and preparing for the artwork are in the art process. Artists prepare for artmaking by thinking about their ideas, visualizing the works they might make, recording ideas in notes and sketches, planning for the works, searching for materials and playfully experimenting with various possibilities for carrying out the idea. (1988, p.4)

Collages and the Final Project

To begin the lesson, children were asked to share their 'mystery textures' with the class and from there, discuss their collections of favourite things as well as their ideas for the final project. There were two art activities planned for this lesson. One was a teacher-directed collage making use of the ideas they had collected with regards to their favourite things. They were to make a profile of the silhouette of their heads, which would be projected on the wall and traced on to paper. This was to be cut out and filled in with a collage of pictures representing their favourite things.

The second activity involved the children individually creating the components of their final project, working at their own stations independently. My role would be mainly one of facilitator, responding to the needs of the children and enabling them to experience success as they worked on their own creations. Once the

children had completed their work, it would be necessary to guide and direct the children as they assembled their artwork, collaborating on the final project. Educational objectives for this lesson included providing opportunities for children to experience the various aspects involved in the creative process such as planning, experimenting, problem-solving and strategizing; fostering art experiences that value creativity and self-expression; offering opportunities for the application of learned artistic skills and techniques in the creation of purposeful artworks; encouraging collaboration and co-operation, and providing an environment which reflects humanistic values.

Personal Narrative Reflecting on the Experience

The children shared their idea books presenting the textures they had created as they took turns in the role of 'teacher'. With each turn, children held up their pattern and asked the others to guess how it was made and then explained the process they used. Some of them remembered to bring the mystery object to show us. My favourite one was made with the aluminum tab of the soft drink can which was repeated over and over, each in a different colour. Everyone in the group was valued for having something unique to contribute. This I think, was one of the best ways to express and encourage one's own ideas while building self-esteem. Children took their roles seriously and even the most shy, expertly and enthusiastically took their turns.

The children must have felt empowered with this opportunity of standing up in front of everyone to lead the class in a discussion. They behaved beautifully- it

was a very successful learning experience. I had fun too, trying to guess what objects were used.

Once I had explained the art activity, children were eager to get going. They worked independently and I was able to take them one at a time to make the silhouette of their profile, which they collaged with their favourite things from their idea books. Today I noticed that everyone is asking me for less direction and instruction and I am not hearing the usual "is this good?" This suggests that perhaps the children do not need confirmation from me when they believe in themselves. I have also noticed that they confer and co-operate more with one another. They seem comfortable changing their minds about what they are making when they are inspired by new materials or new ideas. I really did not have to help much with the collages, which gave me time to talk to them individually about the group project. What was really terrific during the collage activity was the co-operation, initiative and problem-solving strategies that took place. I was having trouble casting shadows with the lamp and Tia and Nikki were able to figure out the problem by experimenting with the light. Then they took over my task, which freed me to help others.

Preparation and organization were key to this day going smoothly. When we worked on the group projects, I had this great idea to give each child a place mat as a workstation. On the place mat, I wrote down everything they requested for their final project, and then I helped them find the materials they needed. I must

admit it is challenging to provide for experiences in which children work independently. It is much easier to have everyone follow directions, use the same materials, and create the same product. My ideal teaching experience is actually quite exhausting because I have to wear so many hats and make sure everyone's needs are met. Facilitate often means 'fetch'. I also had to be resourceful when the group decided that they wanted their final project to be a forest! We went to my backyard and cut down a few branches to serve as our trees. Endless amounts of string and tape were needed to display all the work but I witnessed some terrific co-operation. The collages were very successful because they were aesthetically pleasing products, they were constructed from the children's resources of ideas and materials in their idea books, and collages increased self-confidence as children created artwork about themselves and their favourite things.

I find myself thinking about parts and whole. Aspects such as physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development are the parts that make the child whole. Davis referred to middle childhood as the "part over whole" stage whereby the part is the fixation on details and the whole being the overall composition of the picture. I think of the literal stage of middle childhood as part of the whole that is artistic development, and drawing skills are just part of the whole that is artmaking. What I found most satisfying about the group project was that it was representative of all the parts that make up the whole that is the artmaking experience. Each individual creation was a part that made up the whole that was

our final display. Each child was the part in the whole that made our community of artmakers. Each skill or technique was the part of the whole that was our finished product; each thought and each experience was the part of the whole that contributed to the learning process.

Celebration and Art Appreciation

The final hours in this session of art classes were to be a celebration of our artwork and of the community of artmakers that we had become. The children were involved in the preparation of the celebration, planning which snacks they would like to contribute and they were responsible for providing and displaying these contributions. The children were ultimately the decision-makers for the final project of creating a forest of trees decorated with representations of their favourite things. They participated in creating the display for the final project and for the collection of artwork from this art session. Once everything was in place, I planned to add a few special touches as my contribution to the celebration. This included spot lights, twinkling lights, streamers, music and even pet rabbits to hop around our forest! Following the celebration, the remainder of the time was to be reserved for the children's responses. As I had discovered during this session, even after doubling the time from one to two hours, there is never enough time in art class to do everything you want to do.

Personal Narrative Reflecting on the Experience

The children arrived full of enthusiasm as they arranged their snacks on the table and took pride in the contributions they had made to the party. Last minute touches were added to the trees and when everyone was ready, I added my own contributions to the event- the lighting, music and bunnies. The effect was not lost on them. It was so rewarding to watch them marvel at what they had created both independently and as a group. It was wonderful to see the children admire and discuss the artwork on the wall- I didn't ask them to do this, it was their genuine interest and pride in seeing all their work displayed at once for the first time. These children never want to miss anything; they are so enthusiastic about everything we do in art class. I think they actually are able to have a greater appreciation for all the work they have done when it is on display like this. Everyone was socializing and looking at the art and of course, the food table! I invited them to start the party with a snack and they were almost shy at first- they sat with their plates on their knees, sitting on chairs all lined up in a row! I actually had to get the 'joint jumping' by putting on some swinging music, dancing around and acting a bit goofy. Yet another role for me to play- social director! I rearranged the chairs into a semi-circle and asked if anyone wanted to dance or play the piano. That got things moving! Then I videotaped the party, and asked them to comment on the display. Unfortunately, they were not interested in talking about it anymore and I had not been prepared to record their comments during the impromptu discussion held during their arrival. When the celebrating was over, we had a very successful art appreciation session during the time I had

reserved for the children's responses. Finally, we talked about the display then took everything down as each person held out his or her bag to collect the artwork- this was a good way to do it- it was like Hallowe'en, in fact, they even jokingly said "Trick or treat"! They were glad to get to take home their artwork finally.

In the time I had set aside for responses about the artwork, the children had very little to say. I asked questions such as "which materials did you enjoy working with most" and "which is your favourite piece that you made and why?" Their responses were limited to answers such as "the printmaking" and "the painting because it was fun". I never did get much response from the children about their own artwork. Reflecting on this, I have realized that when I am finished working on my own art, I do not have a particular need to talk about it. In fact, I would rather not. It is probably because everything is worked out in the process of creating and the finished product becomes the answer. Let others talk about it. Having established that the children did not want to talk about their own art, Julia requested that I tell them stories about artists. This turned into an impromptu and very illuminating art appreciation session. I had grabbed a stack of art books off my shelf and flipped through them, looking for a sampling of different things...I held up examples of art which were from different periods and of various styles. I wanted to get their individual responses but in my mind, I was sure they would like the realistic artwork best. The results were very surprising to me- they didn't. Not one of them told me that the realistic ones were the best. I was astounded and delighted. To me, this demonstrated that children who have been exposed

to a variety of artmaking experiences, develop their own preferences in artmaking and in the types of art they admire.

In this response session, we discussed a wide range of work by artists including Manet, Frans Hals, Matisse, Man Ray, Rothko, Rauschenberg, Tony Bennett, and Lino. I included Lino, a contemporary Montreal artist who does collage with a social message, because I wanted the children to understand that art can be interesting and meaningful and have something important to say. I chose Tony Bennett, because he is a musician who is also an artist, and I wanted to demonstrate that you can love doing more than one job. You can be good at more than one thing. I wanted the children to understand that art can be different things to different people.

From this experience I learned that art appreciation sessions can be highly educational, enjoyable, and can inspire debates and discussions amongst children. It is an exercise that should be included in every art class- if only time would permit it. Children do not often have the opportunity to voice their opinions and have them validated in a group setting. It takes time to establish an environment where children can speak openly and feel secure that their voices will be heard and their opinions will be respected. From this experience, I learned that children at this stage of development can overcome the need for creating peer-accepted art and can voice their own opinions. The key to doing so is in establishing an environment that supports creativity and originality. Children at

this age are becoming less egocentric and are ready to learn about the work of others. This is an ideal time in their development to introduce art appreciation.

Unexpectedly, this art appreciation session opened up discussions about bigger issues and social concerns. I realized that it is very easy to underestimate children's capacity for thinking and learning. It was amazing to see how their views changed with new knowledge. First, I would ask them for their authentic responses to a work, then I would tell them something about it, then ask them again for their views. An example of this was with the Lino collage of doves flying out of the open mouth of an African boy. First they laughed at it and made fun of it. When I told them it was about war and children and peace- it became one of their favourites! It is relevant to note the importance of meaning in a work. The children valued the work more when they could attach meaning to it.

Sample of dialogue in response to Lino collage:

ME: this painting is a collage- like the collages you made of your favourite things and your silhouette, remember? This one was made by a Montreal artist who works now; in the present. A contemporary artist. What is your impression of this artwork? What do you think it is about?

NIKKI: I think it's about watching birds

ME: Do you think he is saying something happy or sad or good or scary or serious? What is your impression? What does it say to you when you look at it? What feeling does it give you?

KAITLIN: I don't like it

STEPHANIE: It's sad

MARLEY: It's ugly

DENIS: It's scary

JULIA: It's disturbing

TIA: I would like to know what it's about. I am not sure I like it.

ME: Okay, It is important to know what it is about. You might feel differently about it when you understand the meaning of it. This is about war. The artist is trying to show that war is horrible to live through. It affects not just the soldiers, but everyone, including children. These doves are birds that represent peace. If you have a feeling that it is scary or sad when you look at this, its because war is scary and sad.

Children can be very sophisticated about art at times. They also have a terrific capacity for retaining new information. Building a life-long appreciation for art begins with learning about works of art in childhood. When Tia saw the Rothko painting, she exclaimed: "there isn't even magenta!" An astute response to seeing the title of the painting "Magenta, Black, Green on Orange" (1949). As a group, we wondered why it was called that. After looking at it sharply, Nikki noted that she could see some pink underneath the "black square". Not everyone agreed, but they all agreed they did not like that black square!

In trying to learn whether children at this stage would value realistic paintings most, I learned a few surprising things. First of all, what I consider realism is not necessary what children consider realism. Secondly, that maturity plays a big role in what children appreciate and importantly, do not appreciate in art! They absolutely giggled at the Manet: "You are not going to make us look at that, are you?" This was the indignant response before I had even held it up. These children did not want to see nudes. I was thinking it was a good example of realism, they were thinking it was a good example of nudity!

Once again I had to be reminded about the child's perspective based on her level of development. I thought the Man Ray would provide them with an example of a good drawing but to my surprise, they hated it! They were immediately upset by the subject- a woman with no clothes on (though her body was completely covered by a blanket). They were upset by the suggestion of nudity, which had not even registered with me when I chose it.

Sample of dialogue in response to the Man Ray drawing:

ME: Here is a drawing that was done about 80 years ago, but I think it looks contemporary-like it could have been drawn now, at our time. I would like to know what you think about it.

JULIA: I don't like it. She looks naked with a blanket around her, closing her eyes.

STEPHANIE: I don't like her eyes closed.

ME: This artist drew his girlfriend when she was sleeping, that's all.

ALL: Ooooooh. Yukkk!

KAITLIN: I would like to know her eyecolour. And the colour of her hair. Why is it done only in black and white?

ME: Because it's a drawing. Just like you have done, with no colour.

DENIS: I don't like her eyes because she looks like she's transforming into a dragon

ME: I guess you guys don't think she looks restful and lovely? Ha ha ha. This is very interesting, because I thought that you would think that this is a good drawing. I was wrong. But I like it anyways.

As teachers we constantly make assumptions based on our own beliefs and perspectives. These examples of dialogue illustrate to me that we need to find out what children think, give them the opportunity to express their thoughts and do so in an environment that makes doing so possible for everyone.

I was pleased to hear the children talk about what they liked about the art lessons. Julia said "I like making things the way I think they should be." Tia said "I like that I am getting better at it and I make beautiful paintings and I try new things". Nikki and Marley said they both like doing everything in art and Kaitlin said "I will definitely keep doing art because it is my best thing." Stephanie described her preference for constructing with paper and experimenting with art materials. Denis made a comparison between art lessons here and art lessons

at his school by saying "I like art here. I like to try everything. All we do at school is draw and the teacher draws on my paper, and we never build things!"

Chapter VII

Children's Responses

My ultimate goal as a teacher is to contribute to building positive self-esteem in every child I teach. In my art practice, I have the opportunity to give children a voice through their artmaking experiences, as well as through their responses to these experiences. I encourage children to value their own ideas and expressions in art, with the hope that they will gain confidence in their overall artistic abilities and in themselves. Torrance and Myers (1970), describe the ideal responsive classroom:

A place where, without being afraid of ridicule or ostracism, pupils can try out their ideas and receive feedback as to whether the ideas are understandable. A responsive teacher is one who both encourages his pupils to express themselves and indicates his respect for their ability to produce ideas. (p.260).

My role is to initiate the topic of discussion and to model the diplomacy and respect I expect in this environment. Questions are guidelines for discussions and are not rigid. Sometimes questions serve as a jumping off point which leads to other discussions of relevance to the students. Open-ended questions invite diversity and divergent thinking since they do not require one correct answer. In this way, children respond in terms of their own ideas and experiences. Torrance and Myers describe both the necessity and the rewards of offering such experiences in the classroom or studio:

Questions that call for divergent thinking enable those pupils who have not shone when memory and convergent thinking questions were asked, to demonstrate that they can think too. Here is a chance for all children to shine to demonstrate their intellectual capabilities... the most gratifying results of open-ended questioning is that pupils discover that they have worthwhile ideas. Open-ended questions that feature original thinking can do a great deal for the child's self-concept. They are not just for those who are good at reciting "correct" answers. Here they have to think, have an opinion. (p.195)

From my own experience, I have found that providing opportunities for children to voice their opinions comes with certain challenges. For instance, it is difficult to give everyone a turn to speak, or from having children steal the spotlight from others. Children may be unresponsive altogether, or provide irrelevant comments and discussions often stray off topic. Despite these challenges I have learned something of great value to my teaching practice. By reflecting on my practice, I realize that I care very much about what children think and what they have to say and therefore, must ensure that I provide a responsive environment in my classroom and art studio. Torrance and Myers describe the responsive teacher in this way:

There is a tremendous difference in the manner in which teachers receive their pupils' responses, ranging from no comment at all to rejection to enthusiastic endorsement. The responsive teacher, however, is not usually an effusive one. He shows his acceptance in many ways other than by praising. His manner can communicate very effectively that he is happy to receive the contributions of his pupils. The accepting-respecting attitude necessary to encourage divergent thinking is hard to describe because it varies from teacher to teacher. The fascinating and frustrating part of trying to discover just what makes a teacher the kind of person who inspires children to be truly excited about expressing their ideas is that teacher behaviour cannot really be reduced to an analysis of either verbal or nonverbal elements. Many intangibles operate to make

teachers effective...We are only certain of one thing: when a teacher doesn't accept and respect children, very little of what he does will be effective in helping them grow intellectually, socially, morally (p. 189).

Children's responses become an important resource for curriculum planning and evaluation as teachers reflect upon what the responses have revealed about what the child values and what he understands. For example, when I asked children which art lesson they enjoyed most and why, I learned from their responses that the majority of the children liked opportunities to use the art materials in their own way when they were already familiar with the materials, but that they preferred instruction when they were unfamiliar with the materials. Each child named a different aspect of the art lessons as her own preference, which suggested that a variety of artmaking experiences were valued by this age group.

The children's responses provided further questions for me to investigate as I challenge myself and as they challenged me, to become a better educator within my own practice. This is evident in the following sample of dialogue and my reflections of the dialogue:

ME: Well, Julia, you haven't said which artwork you think is the best.

JULIA: None. I don't think any are the best. I like abstract art but not the kind with stripes or circles.

(I invite her to flip through my art books. She holds up Rauschenberg's Untitled, 1956)

JULIA: This one is the best.

(I am stunned. Then I am more stunned when everyone says YEAH!)

ME: Wow. I am amazed. That is one of my favourite artworks right there (Am I influencing them more than I realize? Or are they just exposed to more than most kids and have developed a sophisticated taste in art? Or do they like that it looks like something they could make? They seemed to respond with

genuine enthusiasm when they saw the artwork for the first time. They even asked me what I liked about it, and I had to think too. I told them my favourite part was the goopy thick line of paint squirted right out of the tube. They asked "why"? This was great! They were challenging me! I said "because I like how it looks and I think it takes a lot of courage to be so bold as to squirt the paint right on to the canvas and leave it there!"

To have such an exciting response session is very rewarding for the teacher as well as for the students since discussions provide learning opportunities in which the teacher shares her knowledge and expertise.

Finally, I feel privileged that the children in my art class are so willing to share their observations and opinions with our group. Children have a unique perspective and for me, hearing what children have to say is one of the supreme joys of teaching. I believe that it is because children feel safe and secure in the environment we have created, that they feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Children must feel that their opinions will be valued and respected:

Sharing one's responses to a work of art is a public revelation about something highly personal. Children must trust their listeners, and know their ideas will be respected, before they can feel comfortable revealing themselves in this way. (Epstein & Tremis, 2002, p.96)

Chapter VIII

The Teacher and the Environment

To create art programs that matter to students and teachers alike, the values of the teacher must be reflected in the environment and in the lessons she has created. To ensure that these values are present and that educational objectives are met, the teacher takes on the role of investigator:

As we use our imagination, we look for opportunities to apply, implement, and experiment with the new theories and research that have reached beyond existing practices. As we use our abilities to reflect on what we are learning in the process of experimentation-our successes and failures- we need to be honest with ourselves so that we can develop suggestions for an intelligent educational art. (John Dewey quoted by Simpson, 2005, p.98)

Kalin and Kind (2005) recommend that teachers reflect upon both educational theories and on their own teaching experiences while planning and implementing educational programs. To provide for art that matters, they recommend that teachers ask themselves such key questions as: "Is it inclusive? Are students engaged as active participants? Does it value and support the student? Is it relevant? Does it nurture self-identity?" (p.10-15). When I created my own art program, I had to continually make changes to the art lessons so that the children's needs were met, and therefore each lesson was improved upon as I considered the types of key questions Kalin and Kind have described. Providing for art that matters begins with the belief that every student matters.

In creating my own art program, I considered the meaning of curriculum and its purpose in my own teaching practice and discovered that the ideas put forth by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) most reflect my own beliefs. They suggested that curriculum means different things to different people, with the belief that what is taught and how it is presented is determined by what matters to the teacher responsible. In creating art lessons for children in middle childhood, I have thought philosophically about education so that my teaching better reflects my own values. Based on my experiences creating, implementing and reflecting on this art program for middle childhood, it is my belief that teachers should approach teaching and the lessons they create with the attitude of "how can I best serve my students?"

Also relevant to my own beliefs and experiences with regard to learning how to create art lessons for middle childhood is the work of Miller and Seller (1990) who have described curriculum as an ongoing process, which would stress the importance of meaning, purpose, and experience. Similarly, Torrance and Myers (1970) recognized that curriculum should be designed with genuine purpose and meaning for ideal learning experiences. This would include opportunities for problem-solving, decision-making, challenges and responses. In this way, motivation to learn would be intrinsic:

Creative ways of learning have a built-in motivating power that makes unnecessary the application of rewards and punishment....it is our contention that if teachers keep alive the creative processes of their pupils and sensitively guide them, there will be plenty of motivation and achievement. (p.49)

In creating and implementing an art program which emphasizes creativity and meaning-making, I experienced the notion of the teacher as one who wears many hats. It is both exhausting and rewarding to support learning in a constructivist environment, meaning one where knowledge and learning are actively acquired by children who are full participants in the learning process. In such an environment as was created in my own art program, I experienced the following as succinctly described by Epstein & Tremis (2002):

Many terms can describe the role of the teacher; organizer, planner, supplier, collaborator, playmate, animator, inspirer, facilitator, assistant, co-discoverer, companion, and so on. To fulfill these roles, teachers should possess the qualities of flexibility, enthusiasm, and the joy of discovery. (p.126)

It is my belief that educators must give consideration to who they teach and how they teach and not simply what they teach. In an art program which puts the needs of the children first, I discovered that there are plenty of opportunities for the teacher to demonstrate her knowledge and skills in her area of expertise. It is evident, in both the children's responses and in the dialogue we shared throughout the art lessons, that children experience growth when learning is meaningful and relevant to their own experiences.

In Early Childhood Education, one of the most respected approaches to teaching children is that of Reggio Emilia, which celebrates the uniqueness of each child, yet views children within the context of their community. Based on the educational philosophy of John Dewey, the Reggio Emilia approach shares the

view that learning in the classroom or art studio should be relevant to living in the real world. Encouraging children to work together is an essential component in the Reggio Emilia approach to learning:

The educators in Reggio Emilia believe that the experiences children have in participating in a learning group in their early years will benefit them all their lives. Teachers who embrace the principles learned from Reggio Emilia, learned how to support children in working together successfully to achieve the group's purpose. They invite children to join a group, support them as they interact with other children in the group, and help them learn how to listen, accept others' points of view, and blend their own ideas with those of other group members. Teachers know when to take the lead and when to hand it over to the children.
(Fraser, 2006, p.64)

There is a connection between the creative process and the learning process which suggests that art education has the potential to be invaluable for childrens' learning. I share with the educators of Reggio Emilia the belief that "the studio space is not an isolated place where artistic things happen. It is a laboratory for thinking" (Gandini,2005, p.49). What artists experience as they work through the stages of the artistic process is comparable to the ideal learning experience: Both processes require opportunities for exploration, experimentation, creativity, problem-solving, and the application of skills and knowledge towards a meaningful purpose. Art reflects society- it is about the past, present and future. As artists we expect and appreciate change and as art educators we realize that teachers need to change their strategies to suit the times and to suit their students. There is nothing commonplace in considering the needs of others, which is what educators are asked to do when they put these theories into practice and reflect on the programs they create.

Chapter IX

Conclusion

The purpose of my thesis was to create art lessons for 7 to 9-year-olds attending community art classes, which would respond to the pressure for conformity and product orientation occurring naturally within this age group. It was my hope that by minimizing these very pressures within the art experience and instead emphasizing elements of creativity and meaning-making, children would become better equipped to persevere through this challenging period of artistic development. My goal was to keep children engaged in the artmaking experience and to instill in them a deep appreciation for art.

Through the reflective practice that formed the basis of my research I have made several key discoveries which have implications for future practice in art education in middle childhood. Children at this age are interested and able to think intelligently about art, particularly when art concepts are not necessarily related to their own work, but rather to the work of others. This implies that response sessions and opportunities for dialogue should always be included in an art program with this age group. In particular, art appreciation sessions encourage learner inquiry when children have the opportunity to ask questions about the art they find interesting. Furthermore, children who have been exposed to a wide variety of art develop their own preferences in artmaking and in the types of art they admire. Art appreciation sessions can be highly educational and enjoyable and can inspire debates and discussions amongst

children. Children do not often have the opportunity to voice their opinions and have them validated in a group setting. It takes time to establish an environment where children can speak openly and feel secure that their voices will be heard and their opinions respected. Children at this stage of development can in fact overcome the need for creating peer-accepted art and can voice their own opinions. The key to doing so is in being provided with an environment that supports creativity and originality and one which respects the learner as an individual.

To teach art in a constructivist environment which emphasizes learning over teaching does not result in immediate success. Lessons must evolve over time and through lived experiences that support both individual interests as well as cooperative learning. To meet the needs of all students requires the teacher to wear many hats but is well worth the effort. It is evident in the children's responses to these art lessons that they gain confidence in their artistic abilities when they are encouraged to value their own ideas and expressions in artmaking. Through their actions and their words, children demonstrated an increasing sense of self-confidence as they engaged in art activities that challenged their thinking skills and required them to be actively involved in the artistic process.

Having developed an environment that respected the physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs of the students in my group, I also realized the necessity of

understanding and recognizing specific aspects of artistic development such as the U-curve phenomenon. Rather than dwelling on drawing instruction at this stage, I found value in emphasizing creativity and originality within the art lessons. When drawing instruction was implemented, it was better to focus on the application of purpose and meaning rather than on achieving realism as an end result. By encouraging creativity and meaning-making in art experiences, I was able to instill confidence in the students, and in doing so, nurtured their capacity for learning.

This research supports my persistent belief that children must be encouraged to value their own ideas, and to be provided with opportunities to express themselves in what they know, what they believe, and how they feel.

Specifically, children who believe in their own ideas and expressions in art are more likely to find purpose in their work, and therefore be motivated to persevere through the more challenging periods of artistic development. This makes possible a life-long appreciation for art and for young artists to grow up and become divergent thinkers, creative thinkers and problem-solvers in all fields.

Some young artists will grow up to become professional artists, art educators and art historians, while others will enjoy art experiences in their leisure time, as amateur artists or importantly, as patrons of the arts. All are more likely to become productive participants of their communities and tolerant citizens of the world.

The research for this thesis has implications for further study. Children between the ages of 7 and 9 are at the beginning of the literal stage of artistic development. Would children in the next age range of 10 to 13-years-old experience the same success, or is there a window of opportunity at the beginning of middle childhood which must be acted upon? I had experienced favourable results with this age group, but what if they had come to me a few years older? What happens in other types of teaching environments with children at this age? How much influence do teacher preferences in art have on the student's own artwork? Finally, it would be interesting to do a follow up study in later years to determine what role art actually plays in the lives of the participants of this research.

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