Research in Action

Project Summaries from the 1995 Visual Arts Study Group on Reflection and Critique

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 1994-1995 school year, 20 visual arts teachers participated in regional study groups across Vermont to explore the potential of reflection and critique in their classrooms. The groups were a combination of critique sessions based on the teachers' own art work and action research projects in the classroom which, in most cases, focused on the practical application of critique in a school setting.

Teachers brought work-in-progress to critique sessions facilitated by artist Sally Warren of Grafton. Sally chose to focus on work-in-progress so that people could present pieces with problems that the group members might help solve. The principles listed below guided the critique sessions.

- Group critique happens for the purpose of:
  - helping an artist articulate and move toward his/her goal
  - providing an artist with additional views so that problems can be solved
  - enlarging the choices an artist has to work from
- Honor everyone's courage to put their work up for comment
- There are no right or wrong solutions, just options being explored
- Everyone will be asked to talk - individuals can pass, but everyone will be asked
- Respect the artist's decisions about how to proceed after group input

In addition to the critique sessions, teachers explored specific questions about classroom practice under the guidance of Kathleen Kesson of Goddard College and Fern Tavalin of the Vermont Arts Assessment Project. For the most part, teachers found that younger students benefited most from descriptive sessions where they learned to use visual art vocabulary to increase their viewing ability. Older students from about grade 4 or 5 were thought to be ready to help solve problems posed to the group. Not all teachers participating in the action research projects were able to translate artistic critique into classroom practice. Many factors influence the success of critique, especially time and the amount of discussion already present in the school culture. Teachers also suggested that students need to be doing projects they care about in order to want to give and receive feedback.

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This report contains summaries of the research projects. A few of the summaries have accompanying appendices. Because of space constraints and the cost of color printing, not all supporting documents were able to be printed along with the teachers' summaries. Please feel free to contact individual teachers for additional information and examples of student work.

Frances A. Allyn
Colchester High School
Colchester VT

Setting

The art program at Colchester High School is valued as an integral part of daily classes. Eight different art courses are offered to the students in a sequential order of increasing difficulty and complexity. The first-year class is Art 1, a year-long 1 Fine Arts credit class which constitutes the foundation year for all other courses. The program culminates in an Advanced Placement/ Advanced Studio course taught on a two-year curriculum cycle. I team-teach the History of Art/Music Literature (HAML) course with the choral music teacher. Using this course as a basis group, we have led three European field trips to major museums and other sights. A fourth trip is planned for next spring to Greece. I conducted my action research project with a new second-level course, 20th Century Art: Meaning and Methods.

All classes have written curricula which are revised annually, and meet daily or the equivalent according to the double mod schedule (see Appendix 1 and 2). I used to serve as district art coordinator, during which time we wrote and published a district-wide sequential art curriculum. This curriculum is based on the principles of production, history, criticism, and aesthetics. The school board eliminated all such positions two years ago, however, and the curriculum has not been used in the middle school since that time. The quality of the art background of students coming to the high school has seriously declined, since many Art 1 students may not have had any art for four to five years. Therefore, a great deal of Art 1 is remedial.

The two art rooms are large, light, and airy, reasonably well maintained and with more than adequate storage space. The equipment is good and includes three potter's wheels, a large kiln, a small press, and a Mac computer with laser printer. The current budget has been cut 17% annually for three years, however, so no contingency fund exists to repair or replace equipment. To offset the cuts in supplies, we have increased the lab fees drastically. We could cut whole pieces of curriculum, for example, oil painting, but we have chosen to go the lab fee route for the time being. Students who cannot afford the fees apply for a waiver, and the administration must fund their fees from "other sources."

What kinds of questions for reflection/critique can I ask which will improve the students' understanding and tolerance for non-representational art?

Guiding Question

Students on the whole seem to value only "realistic" art. They measure the success of a work on the basis of its photographic qualities, and there is a great appreciation of talent to make things "look real" on a two-dimensional surface. Time spent seems to equate quality as well, and I frequently hear the question, "How long did it take you to do that?"

At the second level of art classes, like 20th Century Art, the primary philosophical goal of the class is to move students in the direction of understanding and valuing nonrepresentational art. In order to do this, I found I had to build incremental steps in vocabulary and production experiences.

Approach

My research group was the 20th Century Art: Meaning and Methods class, consisting of 12 boys, all sophomores and juniors, and one girl, a senior audit. We spent five class sessions, including one double mod day, working through the steps of the plan. Up to this point, through reading, student oral mini-reports, and direct production, the class had studied the movements of impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism (synthetic and analytical), futurism, fauvism, German expressionism, and surrealism (see Appendix 3). They were conversant with oils, pastels, acrylics, watercolor, wood-cut, collage, and video. Even the students who were hold-outs for realism had come a long way in their understanding and appreciation for nontraditional art forms.

The group was also beginning to build an odd *esprit de corps*. They saw themselves as the avant-garde of the school and called themselves "art fags" and reveled in being different. The group also chose experimental music even before the music teacher gave a history lecture on "Modern Music" from 1910-1950. In all these respects, they were primed to be the experimental group for the research question. I suspect the results from this action research would be entirely different if it was done at the beginning of the year without the preparation, and if it was done with an Art 1 mixed group.

My procedures consisted of leading the students through four steps of understanding, with each step providing more information about the artist Kandinsky, a nonrepresentational artist. The steps were (1) viewing and analyzing a specific work, (2) reading some background information on the artist, (3) writing a creative response to a nonrepresentational Kandinsky painting, Gorge Improvisation, 1914, and (4) production of several nonrepresentational paintings. Each student was provided with a folder for assembling their

work, a copy of the Kandinsky study print, and all the necessary painting supplies (see Appendix 4). I felt it was important to emphasize that none of this work would be graded, so that the results in all areas would be honest and not just parrot my opinions (see Appendix 5).

In Step 1—Viewing, I used the criticism analysis form from Mittler's *Art in Focus* teacher manual (see Appendix 6). Students were instructed to spend five minutes looking at the print, not talking and not writing. Then they answered the questions on the form and wrote a summary paragraph on #2 based on the analysis chart of the formal qualities which they observed in the print. To assist in their observation, they were also instructed to make a tracing of the print's major shapes and compositional lines. This exercise was followed by a group discussion centering around the interpretation of the artist's intention in the work and whether he had achieved that goal.

As they began to work I noticed that every single student had oriented the print correctly for top-bottom without any obvious reference point like a title or date. We later discussed how they knew which side was up in a nonrepresentational work. They seemed to recognize intuitively the subtle landscape cues which Kandinsky did not succeed in eliminating completely. For example, implied perspective is evident in a docklike shape and separation between water (wavy blue area) and land (flat and yellow). This precipitated a discussion about whether any artist can truly create nonrepresentational art. Doesn't it, by its very existence, represent at least itself and its own reality? Did Kandinsky achieve his intentions? The discussion yielded a variety of responses, predominantly positive and indicating the beginnings of real aesthetic inquiry.

Some student comments:

"I see it as a man stressed out. Confused at his true feelings. Having all feelings running through his head, not knowing which he should paint . . ."

"This work makes me want to figure out what it is all about. I get the feelings of harmonies, life and nature . . ."

"The many shapes and lines and figures in this combined with the many colors, it gives the impression of any happy emotions ."

And on the other side . . .

"It seems to me that this is a chaotic display of emotion . . . anger, dignity, fear . . . The entire mood seems to be enveloped in a blanket of darkness . . . much oppression."

It was clear through the discussion, and from reading their criticism worksheets, that they were taking the artist and his work very seriously. The longer they spent with the work, the more they seemed to value it. By the third day, most students wanted to be reassured that they could keep the Kandinsky print. They had taken ownership of it.

Step 2—Reading involved reading a short essay of background information on Kandinsky (see Appendix 7) and then revisiting the print with the same two questions: What do you think was the artist's intention and do you think he achieved it? The more vocal members of the group expressed a better understanding of the nonrepresentational purpose and analogy to music, but they disagreed with the idea that a color, shape, or line could always represent a certain tone or feeling. Several insisted that a piece of music, like art, could contain many moods and feelings, and that the effect depends on the mindset of the viewer/listener. The students enjoyed this kind of philosophical discussion and they were able to give examples from their own experience.

At this point, the students fundamentally understood and could communicate Kandinsky's intentions of nonrepresentation similar to musical values, but they were increasingly unclear about the manner in which viewers are or should be affected. They freely admitted that not all viewers could be affected the same way and some may not be affected at all. We concluded this step with a game of making up titles for the painting, since they had not yet been told the real title. Suggestions reflected the diversity of feeling about the artist's intentions, and range from "Improvisation" (actual title), "Explosion," and "Drowning" to "Ladder to Heaven" and "Another Day."

I introduced Step 3—Writing by reading a few passages from William Faulkner to illustrate the stream-of-consciousness method of writing. The students were asked to employ this technique using Kandinsky's print as a springboard. Most students were familiar with this free-association style from journal writing exercises in other classes. I expected them to be shy about reading their results aloud, but there was a great clamor to be first! I've selected two pieces which I think demonstrate the analogy of writing intention to visual artistic intention. (I would make note

that they enjoyed this exercise far more than the formal analysis writing in the first step. I might try reversing the two steps at another point.) Their descriptive language was far richer and more meaningful than in their first interpretation statements. They did not seem to have tired of looking at the print.

Two examples of student writing:

> She walks off the pier. There is no longer a harlequin beside her. She wanted to be on the sailboats flapping and straying in the wind of bluebirdings. The water was cool around her reflecting moonlight sails, wings. In the mouth of a giant bird crushed by a super tanker, rotten apples and cherries. She climbs into the umbrella. Tip. The cold water now. She climbs a ladder, her grandfather's tie and sits in the dinghy a cream hat with flowered piping along its rim. Silence. Feathers. Falling left and off the edge of the world. Into clouds she sees mussels beneath her. Their trails on the sand. She has no trail and leaps again.

> The gods are at war
> said the darkness of night
> Perplexed are the shadows
> They stained the white canvas
> Led to execution, the child is bewildered
> Somewhere an angle is suppressed
> A demon searching an inkwell
> Find a wall of aggression and biting its pretenses
> A field is burning in exile and ruin
> A single smile encompasses the fog
> A painful dilemma and a fern bleeding life
> A crack in the placid spectacle of angel hair choking the spiritual plague
> The light has made love to the night
> Spawned a hallucination with a coma for dessert
> The gods are laughing foolish mirages puppets enslaved
> Chaos is order.

On the first day of Step 4—production, the students were given 18"x24" white paper and allowed to choose any paint/media they wished to use. After they were set up, I instructed them to listen to their inner feelings, not to talk out loud, and to paint their inside images (nonrepresentational) for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes they were required to take a new piece of paper and start another painting which lasted 20 minutes or the balance of the

period. At first they simply couldn't get started, and finally they drifted into individual worlds, experimenting with just the pleasure of the color and texture of the paint, creating a wide variety of surface strokes. Some works were very experimental, but nearly all lacked articulation and a sense of organization. The second paintings were more articulate and reflected a greater sense of purpose. All the students expressed frustration with the short time and voiced their opinions loudly. We did not discuss their work as a group that day at all.

On the double mod day, I chose four musical works from 1910-1950 for listening while painting. The works included Schönberg's *Pierre Lunaire,* Stravinsky's *The Rites of Spring,* and Copeland's *Appalachian Spring,* all of which used the twelve-tone scale. We concluded with Miles Davis and some early jazz. The purpose of adding experimental music was to see if music of the same period would increase the student's ability to appreciate and understand Kandinsky's proposed connection between nonrepresentational art and musical values—tone, pitch, rhythm, timbre.

The results were consistently better organized and most students painted thoughtfully and silently the whole double period, pausing only when the music changed. Some of the comments later were positive. "The music inspires." "The musical variations created different textures. Painting to music creates an extraordinary emergence of emotion and influences the mood." "Music sets the painter free and allows sound to replace thought." Then there were students who found the music a distraction. "I found that while I listened to music, I tried to show on paper what I was hearing. That was very hard to do since it couldn't be representational." So in some cases the music was an inspiration and in others it had to be submerged or controlled. (Note: I suspect—knowing the personalities of the particular students—that the freer, more emotionally responsive students were those who were not afraid to react to the music and were not worried about making a "pretty" or "correct" picture. Those who like to know if their work is right and seem to need to have a plan for every work before they begin were the least responsive to the music . . . which of course is a whole other area of research.)

On the final day the students had an opportunity to select one of their paintings from either day, and nearly all selected work from the second day (with music). They spoke about their intentions and whether they felt successful in their work. Excerpted comments from the videotape done on the day of group criticism appear below the photo of their work. An accompanying complete videotape has also been sent along with this report. The tape dem-

onstrates their assessments of their own work, and also demonstrates some of the critique techniques I learned from my adult artist group (see Appendix 8).

Analysis/Synthesis

I learned that:

- Increasing high school student tolerance for and valuing of nonrepresentational art requires a step procedure, rather than a one-shot lesson.

- Tolerance and vocabulary are built slowly, and laying groundwork in other movements is essential.

- Other art forms, such as music and writing, seem to aid the growth process, enriching the experience and the vocabulary . . . although not always. I suspect drama and dance could also expand the depth of understanding as well.

- Students need to trust their teacher when he/she is leading them through unknown, uncharted visual territories.

- Individual study prints are a must from now on. Big prints, slides, and books are fine but they are no substitute for the "ownership" idea. Students somehow become invested in the artist and his work.

Successes:

- They loved the week because they viewed themselves as experimental "rats" which set them apart from other students. I believe they also really liked the depth of the experiences, the variety of media, and the seriousness of the critique, all of which played a part in the research project. I should plan everything this carefully!

New Questions:

- Why and how do students respond so differently to the combination of music and art? How do the art forms really affect each other? When are they supportive and when are they not? What types of music aid creation in certain students? Which kinds of music inhibit creativity in which kinds of students?

- What happens when this approach is used with a beginning

class? How would the approach need to be changed to deal with an Advanced Placement class?

Epilogue

At first I could not see how critiquing my own work and that of other adult artists could affect my classroom procedures. But it did in several ways. First, I found myself much more sensitive to what the student artist was saying about his work. I became more inclined to really listen without constantly feeling that I had to come up with a solution or a suggestion for improvement. I was less quick to say "Try this" and more inclined to give them a chance to see the solution themselves. I had to confront the idea that a student knows intuitively when a work of art is done.

Students also know when they need help, and that help can come from peers as well as from me. In an Art 1 class, the students were working on traditional landscape paintings. I encouraged students who felt done to ask a friend to view the work with them and to see if they reached the same conclusion. The student artist would frequently accept the suggestion of a friend as valid or make their own suggestions before anyone could even comment. This method was much more satisfying and nonthreatening than whole-class critiques with 25 students.

In the 20th Century Art class, we critiqued as a group. I stated at the beginning that these are finished works, that the artist speaks first about his intentions and resolutions and then others may ask questions or comment. The fact that all the work was nonrepresentational meant that the new vocabulary from analysis and interpretation had to be used in order to talk effectively about the works. It took the whole class time to do this, and everyone was very supportive and serious about each other's work. The process validated them as artists who were capable of discussing their own and others' work intelligently. They were really shocked when the bell rang and the class was over.

I learned that it pays to take time to listen, discuss, and reflect with the student artist as well as with myself and adult artists. The instincts and the needs are the same. If I view the student as a serious artist, that student will indeed exceed my expectations and certainly his own.

Barbara Crandall
J.F.K. Elementary School
Winooski VT

Introduction

At our first meeting in January, our group brainstormed different ways that critique, and issues surrounding critique, could affect assessment. My action research topic was based on parental input: what parents wanted to know about their children's artwork. These questions were then incorporated into the actual critique process used within the classroom. The final results will eventually be incorporated into the information given to parents through report cards under the heading of Visual Arts.

Setting

The school district in which I teach is located in northwestern Vermont, and is a suburb of Burlington. About 450 children attend the elementary school.

The elementary art program begins formally in first grade and continues through fifth grade. Visual arts classes continue as rotations through the middle school program and 1-credit arts classes are available at the high school level.

This past year I taught art to first through fifth grades, three and a half days per week. The art position, as the other subject areas, is based on the philosophy and goal of allowing each student to have the opportunity for decision-making, problem-solving, and continuing personal development to reach their highest potential. This school district has embraced the philosophy of inclusive education. Special subject areas, including art, are scheduled into the student's day once a week for 45 minutes and is blocked as classroom teacher planning time. It is great that we are at least given the opportunity to see the students on a weekly basis; however, this schedule makes it difficult for classroom teachers to become directly involved in the art curriculum. Classroom instruction is absolutely limited to the time allowed in the schedule, and changes depend on teacher flexibility.

In addition to the classroom load, I have been given the time within the schedule to design a "Special Art" program. This program, which functions as an enrichment activity, gives students the opportunity to participate in workshop-like activities that run in blocks of six to nine weeks.

The arts within this school function both independently (each of the arts subjects depends on its own curriculum as a basis for its program) and collaboratively. Each year an effort is made to offer a school-wide cultural theme that unites both the arts and individual subject areas, usually culminating in a performance and art display.

Administrative support in general has been good. All teachers are grouped according to subject area or grade level and are given time to plan together. This has enhanced the effectiveness of the Arts House (or group) and given us the ability to work collectively toward specific arts-related goals. Our P.T.O. has become a strength in the community and is very supportive of the arts, both financially and physically. They have supported artist-in-residence programs, funded outings to the Flynn Theater, and provided after-school programs featuring various community artists. Parents volunteer on a regular basis to help with the after-school art club and in the art classroom.

The physical space allocated for art includes a classroom equipped with counters, cabinets, two sinks, and two storage closets. Equipment includes a small electric kiln and a four-harness floor loom. The kiln is currently being vented.

Guiding Question

The research question that I focused on was, "What do community parents want to know about their children's artwork?" The ultimate goal for this research is to revise the art reports given at report card time.

Approach

Because of the established relationship that I had with the P.T.O., I decided to use the group as my resource. I first conducted an informal poll of members and parents who frequented the art classes and asked them what they would like to know about their children's artwork. Answers varied from "How my child behaves in the class" and "More information about the projects that are being done" to "Are the students meeting the prescribed skill levels?" and "What does 'S' stand for, anyway?"

I then decided that a more formal approach in connecting with the parents was necessary, so I made an appointment to meet with the P.T.O. education committee. Before the meeting I made copies of a draft rubric of the Vermont Arts Assessment Project. This page shows the levels of use of elements and principles of design as "minimal," "partial," "effective,"

"strong," and "exceptional." I explained that this was a draft of a document that was being worked on by the Vermont Assessment Design Team, and gave each member a copy to which they could refer as we discussed it. I then gave an overview of what I was trying to do and asked what each of the members would like to know about the students' artwork. The parents wanted to know:

What project were the students working on?
Are the students meeting skill levels?
Is the students' behavior appropriate?
What is the students' level of involvement in the art activity?
Did the student enjoy the activity? (Can we equate this with feeling successful?)

The next task was to design a set of questions and guidelines for future critiques. I decided to use the critique process with the fourth- and fifth-graders only. I explained to all of the students that they would be allowed to volunteer to have their work critiqued. I explained that the art room was a safe place to discuss their artwork and that there would be no put-downs, only constructive criticism. Each student volunteer was asked if there were any problem areas in their work and if they wanted these areas discussed.

A. Knowledge of the subject. As the students presented their work to be critiqued they explained what the project was that they were working on and how they attempted to solve the problems. If this process was at all unclear I would interject and help explain the project and its objectives. The student then addressed whether the work was finished or in progress.

B. Skill levels. This was a very sensitive area to approach. By clarifying the objectives of the project the students were able to determine if those objectives had been met and at what skill level. Often the other students would ask questions that would clarify the issues. No one ever judged the level of skill. The students just voiced comments and concerns. Some examples of these comments are listed below.

Why did you choose to draw this?
What inspired you?
I see . . .
What is . . .?
I like the way you . . .
It looks like . . .

C. Personal involvement. In order to get a sense of each student's involvement in their work, I asked the following questions.

How much time did this piece take you?
Did you enjoy working on this piece?
How did you feel about the materials you used?
How did you choose the subject for this piece?
How did you solve the problem areas, if any?

D. Personal satisfaction. Since the question of personal satisfaction was raised by the parents and was an important issue, the students were asked if they enjoyed this project, and what the most important part of the project was.

These questions were presented to the students throughout the critique. The issue of classroom behavior was self-explanatory, and I didn't feel the need to include it in the critique process.

The critique process was used as a culminating activity for the semester's artwork. The students had four projects to choose from: Grecian pottery with scraffito mythology used as surface design; abstract expressionistic acrylic paintings based on a museum display and workshop; realistic figure models, built with wire and plaster gauze, that showed movement and were based on a dance residency with Karen Amirault; and watercolor washes with contrasting silhouette.

Analysis/Synthesis

Each of the fifth and fourth/fifth combination classes (six in total) used the above series of questions for their critiques. I felt that in general the students chose their most successful piece to critique, although that was not always the case. Surprisingly, a pattern emerged in the types of responses that were given. Most of the sessions started out tentatively, with students supporting the artist and then inquiring about the work. Then came questioning about the personal nature of the work and metaphoric comparatives, with the artist commenting on the work's concept. As the inquiries progressed, students became more interested in the process and the techniques used; and finally they would address the problem areas and offer suggestions to the artist.

The critiques proved to be a great success. Students volunteered to stay after class to have their works critiqued and to participate in critiquing other students' work. All students came away from these critiques with the ability to explain and defend their artwork.

Epilogue

A revision of the report cards reflecting art progress has not yet been made. This study was limited in scope. And while the information received from the parents on the education committee of the P.T.O. was a valid reflection of parental concerns, it is not necessarily reflective of all of the information that parents could receive about their children's artwork. As we begin to develop our own assessment criteria, more information about arts assessment needs to be provided to larger groups of parents. Only then can we get truly accurate input based on our needs as art educators. With this information we can begin to evaluate our children's artwork in ways that are meaningful to us as art educators, to our students, and to the parents—so that they can understand what kind of learning occurs within art classrooms.

The critique sessions with Sally were helpful to me as an artist. Although I have experienced critique as a student, I had never experienced it as an artist. Sally brought a sensitivity to the process that I hope I can bring into the classroom. And although I'm sure I was aware of it before, the use of critique for works in progress is invaluable. I intend to use this in the classroom. I also intend to continue the work of revising the report cards, our information link to parents.

Alyce Schermerhorn
Mary Hogan Elementary School
Middlebury VT

Setting

Mary Hogan Elementary School has 617 students enrolled in kindergarten through sixth grade. The art department serves only the students in first through sixth grades because of limited scheduling time. First through third grades have art class for 35 minutes, fourth grade has 40 minutes, and the fifth and sixth grades, 50 minutes. All students have class once a week, which means about 36 times in one school year. Two fourth-grade classrooms have opted to have class once a week for one hour. These teachers alternate each week in one time slot.

We have at least ten minutes scheduled between each class. Our day is a mix of grade levels: for example, Thursday we begin with a sixth grade, then a fifth/sixth combination, followed by a fourth, a first, and a third, and ending with a fourth. The schedule allows for one studio art slot each week for one hour and twenty minutes. Studio art is time when we can invite some students who are behind for whatever reason, or maybe a whole class working on a special unit. We have one full-time instructional assistant in the art room.

The classroom is very large, allowing for six table groups consisting of two large rectangular tables pushed together. We have a generous storage area with large shelves, and space for a kiln that is vented to the outside. The room has a rug area for sharing and two sinks that are suited to adult users. We also have two teacher desks and a computer. The storage area for student work is limited; each class has a shelf that is 46" x 20". We have four windows that allow for some natural light.

The art program is designed to be studio-oriented. Students are introduced to a variety of two- and three-dimensional media each year. I try to give students as much personal latitude as possible within the project's parameters. Our school district (Addison County Supervisory Union) does have a curriculum guide which represents a comprehensive approach to the arts.

The school is supported by the community and at this writing, all the budgets submitted to the voters have passed. The school is guided by a document called the Middlebury Design, drafted by teachers, administrators, and community members to provide a philosophical approach to learning in the town of Middlebury. The Design is very supportive of the arts. Parents have come to

expect a very strong art program and have expressed their general satisfaction with our current system. We are allowed a budget for the year of about $4.68 per student.

Guiding Question

What grade do you start critique with students?

First, in talking about critique it became evident that it takes time for one to develop the necessary vocabulary and to become comfortable with critique.

Students become better learners when they take responsibility for their learning and understand the dynamics of the learning process. Assessment and self-assessment are part of that framework. Critique is one tool for our personal advancement.

When I became a member of the Vermont Arts Assessment Project, I began to spend more time focusing on critique. As I asked students more often in fifth and sixth grade to talk about their art work, they usually looked a bit blank and said, "I like it." Furthermore, I was met with great resistance from most students. "What," they would say, "are we only going to talk today?!" They all felt that in art class we don't talk, we make things.

So, how was I going to get students to see the value in their assessment and not just the teacher's? It occurred to me that when foreign language professionals talk about the best way to learn a language, they say, "Start early." I needed to eliminate old perceptions of art class as a place to make things, and include in students' expectations time for reflection, which might include dialogue or writing. But how early?

Approach

I knew that students in upper grades frowned on talking in art, so I began an immediate PR campaign to change their minds and allow them to see the value in what I was asking them to do. I began by asking them if they ever wished they could change something after it was finished. They all said yes. Then I made the ever popular and understandable sports analogy. After a football game, do the coach and players return to the locker room and never speak of the game gain? No! They look back at what happened, and ask what went well and what needed to be worked on. That way the next game would be better, and the players would do better and probably feel better about how they played.

Students were bobbing their heads in agreement, as this was a process most of them had been part of at one time or another. Aha! I said. That is what we are asking you to do here. I am head coach, here to guide the evaluation of play (so to speak), and you are all assistant coaches. We are working on how to do better the next time we make something in art by looking at what we have done well—and not so well—in the projects we have finished.

Of course the logical statement made next by that youngster who is really tuned in is, "Too bad it has to be finished when we figure out what went wrong." Absolutely, I say, how can we fix that? So together we conclude that trying to look at work in process might not be a bad idea, and maybe looking at sketches in the beginning is a great idea. In a couple of my classes, after brainstorming sketch sessions we tacked up sketches for our papier-maché mask unit (done by all fifth and sixth grades—about 160 masks), and the students sat quietly. It was very hard for them to get past one of the sketches they had done that was "it." I set up the video camera and nothing much happened. We didn't have much verbal exchange, but at least we took the time to look.

After the early critique I encouraged students to exchange ideas with each other at their table groups. This did happen and some students said it was helpful to them in the end.

Finally, at the end of our unit we set up critique sessions with groups of three to five students. Together we decided what questions were important. Then I asked the questions interview-style so that we could film and students wouldn't feel pressured to remember what we had decided to discuss.

The students were asked for ideas on how they wanted each group to be set up. I reminded them that this was not a test, that they couldn't "get it wrong," and that what we were interested in was their personal opinion. I also told them that it was fine to say they didn't know the answer. I stressed feeling comfortable and that if they got stuck it was no big deal.

We had worked on this mask unit for half the school year and the students were quite invested in the project. This method of smaller group critiques was much more successful than the whole class critiques; some of the feedback was as insightful as some of my graduate school critiques! I was very impressed with their willingness to be thoughtful and serious.

Another way I facilitated critique for a self-portrait unit at the beginning of the year was by writing questions on strips of oaktag

for the students to read. All the art work was tacked up on the wall before class. As students entered the room, I handed a question to every other student.

We went through the questions one at a time. The reader had first crack at answering the question, then it was on the floor for anyone to respond to. Students were engaged for the entire 55-minute session. Although we didn't have the video camera at that point to be able to show this in action, I can say it was very successful.

The questions asked were:

- Which piece, in your opinion, shows the best use of color? Why? (This same question was repeated, substituting texture, contrast, pattern, space, and movement.)
- Which piece looks most like the person who drew it?
- In your opinion, which piece tells the most about the artist?
- Which piece uses symbols to express ideas or feelings?
- _____ shows good craftsmanship, because . . .
- Which piece looks the most finished? Why?
- Are any of the art works or parts of the art work funny?

Since I hypothesized that starting early was the best idea in the long run, I decided to see at what grade students were able to thoughtfully assess their own work. So, after students at each grade level had finished a body of work I used my sports analogy with them and set aside the time to talk. At each grade level ground rules were established. I told them that everyone's art work is different, and that we all make choices for ourselves. We were not to say anything bad about the work, but we could ask questions and make observations.

Because I have such short art periods with first through third grades I decided to tell them how we would discuss the work. They were told they could add anything that they wanted to say and refuse to participate if they wanted to. As soon as I turned on the camera, everyone wanted to have their turn being filmed. I did try to have casual discussions at first, but children are used to taking turns and raising their hands to speak. Although this format was more structured than I had anticipated, it worked well and students were pleased to have the chance to show their projects and speak about them.

The answers received from the first list of questions did not yield in-depth responses. That got me to revamp and work toward replies that showed more thinking. The one thing that the first list was really good for though, was the investigation of opinion.

Questions like, “Which piece, in your opinion, shows the best use of color” led to conversations about how soft and bright colors influence the viewer.

Three different configurations were tried. First all the students were seated on the rug with their drawings and got up one at a time to place the picture on an easel, which enabled them to point out parts of the picture. The second method tried was sitting in chairs in a circle, and finally we sat in chairs around our largest table group and set our clay projects on the table in front of us. The floor proved too “loungie” and I spent more time with wiggly bodies than thoughtful observations. At first it made me question the youngsters’ ability to have this meaningful dialogue. I’m glad that I continued to try other set-ups. The chairs were better, but the most successful by far was the large table. Students were comfortable and less squirmy, and the sessions went very well.

The questions asked this age group were:

- Is there anything you’d like to say about your art work?
- How do you think it turned out? You can’t get this question wrong, it’s your opinion.
- What do you think is the best or most successful part of your art project?
- Is there any part that you would change if you could? A part you’re not happy with?
- If you were to make another one, is there anything that you would do differently than you did this time?
- Does the project look as you expected it to look?
- How do you think you did on the project overall?
- Is there anything anyone would like to ask the artist about their art work?

Students down to first grade were able to make insightful observations about their art work. On their clay slab trays they were able to mention where they needed to add glaze, why the colors were light, and what they needed to do the next time to get them to come out the way they wanted. Some thought they would change colors or make the handles smaller if they could change part of the piece or do another one. Some students said they liked it just how it was and didn’t feel the need to change a thing.

Students did not seem influenced by their peers as much as I thought they might at this early stage. They appeared to make their own observations and feel confident. Many of the children saw my taping the talks as a special event and seemed less unhappy about “just talking” for art time.

One of the major problems I encountered was getting back parental release forms which were necessary to share my video tapes with the project. I had secured a copy of the form late in the game and after talking to some of my colleagues in the project, I felt optimistic about getting the forms back with a seal of approval. However, I was shocked at how many forms didn't come back even after I sent home second copies. There were also a larger number of negative responses than I had foreseen.

Another problem was getting used to the equipment and working out technical bugs. The mic on the camera was not picking up the sometimes hushed voices of the students. I purchased a remote clip-on mic that was great but a pain to pass around to each student, and then we didn't get spontaneous comments. Putting the little mic in the middle of the table was better, but it picked up a lot of the table noise of shifting pottery. Once a student turned the mic switch to "off" and I didn't get the audio recorded for three successive classes. I need to have the mic elevated off the table and facing up.

Taping students in the hallway didn't work either, as folks would walk up during taping and ask what we were doing, or begin talking with someone else. Halls are public and people do not want to behave otherwise when they are in them.

Having the right tape in was important as well. I had bought a tape for taping our flower show and other art work for our resource, and unfortunately I left it in and taped some critique sessions on it by mistake. The camera likes plenty of bright full-spectrum light. Fortunately the room has full-spectrum fluorescents, but a couple of extra lights would be nice.

I can't say I really had problems with critique itself. As soon as youngsters accepted the idea that what we were doing was a valuable part of art class, and that the focus was on their thoughts and ideas rather than on their being "tested," self-assessment flowed smoothly. As students are given some guidance as to the constructive direction of their comments, I have seen that students as young as first grade can engage in meaningful assessment activities. Making reflection part of art class during a students' first experiences will only benefit the student and lay the groundwork for their entire education. Comments, of course, are limited, but a start has definitely been made.

Time was a factor, considering that it did take two sessions to include all students. It may cut into the number of projects, but—as I noted once again in my fifth/sixth-grade mask unit—well-

rounded, quality experiences are more important than throwing numerous projects at students. If you think of a student's art experiences on a first- through sixth-grade continuum and not as one year in isolation, it is easier to see that they are not being cheated out of projects, but enriching the ones they will undertake. Furthermore, you may not include a full-class critique session with each unit. When asked if all the time spent on our mask unit was worth it, students unanimously said yes. A few added that, although it was worth it because of the quality of the product, they wished they could have done some other projects as well.

A couple of times with the very young students I noticed some negative questions or comments. At that point I stopped the critique and reminded students of our ground rules, but more important I also reminded them that another person's vision is not our own and we need to accept the choices of others as (hopefully) the right ones for them. We can, however, talk to them about the choices they made.

Successes were many. As I listened to the students at each grade level, I was astounded at how aware of their art work they were. Their insightful, accurate assessments were very exciting.

For me, new questions include the actual physical set-up of critique sessions. I plan to explore ways in which meaningful assessment can happen to keep students from being bored with the "we all gather in a circle" model. It would seem logical that students in first through third grade would need structured, teacher-guided sessions to teach them the appropriate principles of critique. At that point students are able to write and one can begin to broaden critique options.

The critique sessions with Sally Warren were interesting. I felt a sense of community with the other art teachers working toward the common goal of taking our students farther than we had taken them before. The most important thing I gained was the handout titled, "Principles of a Critique Group" by S.M. Warren. I found it a valuable check sheet as I structured activities.

ARTIST CRITIQUE GROUP: (Distilled) Principles of a Critique Group

- Group critique happens for the purpose of:
  - helping an artist articulate and move toward his/her goal
  - providing an artist with additional views so that problems can be solved
  - enlarging the choices an artist has to work from
- Honor everyone's courage to put their work up for comment
- There are no right or wrong solutions, just options being explored
- Everyone will be asked to talk - individuals can pass, but everyone will be asked
- Respect the artist's decisions about how to proceed after group input

Sample Questions for the Artist::

1. What is working for you? Why?
2. What are you doing next in this piece?
3. How can we help you?
4. Where does it get hard to move forward?

Epilogue

The critique group also kept me focused on the task at hand. As an educator in a public school I am involved in many school initiatives as well as the VCA computer portfolio project, and there are many masters to serve. Personally it reminded me that I don't have time to do my own work. It was stressful to see the months go by and realize how little of it was available for my art. Since I have spent time as a studio professional it seems crazy to stuff my work into hour blocks here and there. The summers provide some time to fill my needs. At this point in time, teaching is my art.

I have always felt reflection was valuable. The research project pushed me to develop ways to allow students to see its value and make them more willing to spend the time in these exchanges. I also spent more time critiquing than I would have. The project took me farther, faster, than I would have gone on my own. It provided focus. Now I am thinking about expanding the ways to do it rather than just doing it!

Unfortunately, I don’t think being involved in personal critique groups is the way to draw many art teachers into the circle. I know that many are not making their own art because of time constraints due to full-time jobs and family obligations. I do feel that a fresh assignment could be given, maybe an art project that they would give to their students. Most teachers say that they do produce examples of the projects they assign. The facilitator could select a self-portrait assignment with the same limited materials that an elementary teacher may have available, crayon and an 18"x24" sheet of drawing paper. Just as students are asked to work “outside their media of choice,” the teachers could experience critique more closely related to the environment that we ask students to experience. Furthermore, a time limit could be imposed as would be the case for their students. This approach would allow more teachers to participate in this process of enlightenment.

Martha Phelps
Molly Stark School
Bennington VT

Introduction

My goal is to teach to the philosophy as stated on the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union Art Report to Parents:

> Art education is one of the most exciting and personal ways people investigate the world of our senses. It is important for us to dream dreams, experience beauty and to express the infinite wonder and mystery of life. An involvement in art in our schools is essential in order to appreciate the richness of the cultural heritage of people throughout the world, past and present.
>
> It is important for our students to participate directly in the making and understanding of their own creations. We use art skills to create the things we take for granted such as our houses and their interiors, cars, clothes, graphic arts, and the countless things we invent and use to make our lives interesting and secure.

I believe enthusiasm, kindness, care, patience, and fun are basic ingredients for the learning atmosphere. I strive to give as much of these as possible.

Setting

Molly Stark School is a K-6 elementary school with 443 students. A new project for the Bennington Schools, called the Lighthouse Project, is located in our building. This is a K-6 choice program that strives to offer integrated curricula, thematic teaching, student advancement consistent with development needs of the individual students, collaborative teaching, and a variety of assessment tools. This project has multi-grade classes and intense parent involvement.

The class size ranges from 18 to 26 students. The kindergarten classes have 20 to 22 children. The class with 26 students, a four/fifth/sixth grade, has been divided into two art classes. The multigrade classes are: kindergarten/first/second; second/third/fourth; third/fourth/fifth; and fourth/fifth/sixth.

The Bennington school district has a K-12 art curriculum that

includes the elements and principles of art, art appreciation, and art techniques.

At Molly Stark School there is an art room with many shelves, one small closet, and one sink. Students work at five large tables.

Guiding Question

How can I identify whether or not my students are using the elements and principles that have been taught in previous lessons? I have assumed students bring past learning to a new situation. During the course of the school year, however, I feel this learning is not happening. I want to improve the bringing of past learning to current projects.

Art elements are taught throughout the year. Line, pattern, and color are presented during the first part of the year. I would like the students to bring these elements to their work or recognize them in art of others during the second half of the school year.

My target groups will include one multi-grade class, one primary class, and one upper-grade class. I will look at projects that utilize the art elements and principles learned in earlier lessons.

1. In the "self-portrait" on each student's portfolio, I will look for a variety of line and pattern.

2. The "Guide for Evaluating Art Work" is a reflection sheet used by the Bennington Schools. When we look at student-selected work and master artist work, I will look for recognition of line, pattern, and color comments in student writing.

3. I will look for a variety of line, pattern, and color in my students' free-choice works.

4. In the "Golden Pencil Assorted Papers" projects I will look for recognition of line, pattern, and color in student comments on a follow-up reflection sheet.

5. The Art Report is used as a report card. I will look for comments the student makes regarding learning about line, pattern, and color.

Approach

SELF-PORTRAIT ON STUDENT PORTFOLIOS
Classes Involved: First/Second Combo, Fifth Grade, Fourth/Fifth/Sixth Combo

Each student in grades one through six has a portfolio. The portfolio is a folder that houses select works by the student and also teacher selected works. On the folder are self-portrait drawings. During one ten minute session each year the students are to draw a likeness of themselves, full figure in a 10" X 6" space. The only materials used are a pencil and an eraser. At the end of the sessions, students are asked to look for differences/improvements from previous years' drawings.

My goal for this research paper was to look for a variety of line: thick, thin, dotted, dashed, or curved; and and any kind of pattern.

RESULTS

	93/94	94/95
First/Second Combo		
Variety of Line	———-	5 out of 10
Pattern	———	9 out of 10

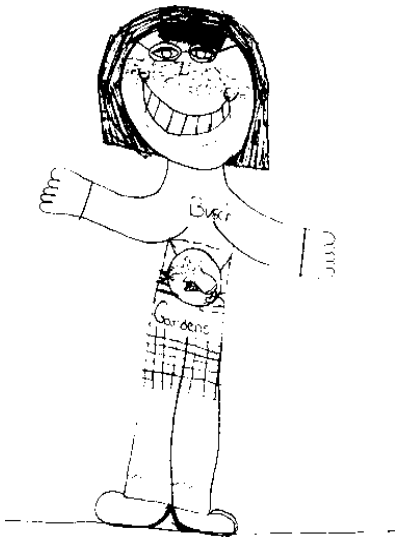
Noticeable differences from 93/94 to 94/95 were more detail and beginning shading.

Fifth Grade		
Variety of Line	3 out of 12	7 out of 12
Pattern	10 out of 12	9 out of 12

Noticeable differences from 93/94 to 94/95 were more storytelling components, bolder drawing and shading.

Fourth/Fifth/Sixth Combo		
Variety of Line	none	4 out of 10
Pattern	5 out of 10	7 out of 10

Noticeable differences from 93/94 to 94/95 were more detail and better definition.



My feeling is pencil drawing a self-portrait in a ten minute session may not invite line variety. The pencil as a drawing tool can make a wide variety of lines and students were taught line variety with pencils. I am feeling the short time block does not offer much time to think or add richness. Line variety is a richness. Pattern making was common. Skilled drawer as well as novice drawer used pattern as a part of their work.

GUIDE FOR EVALUATING ART WORK
Classes Involved: Third/Fourth/Fifth Combo, Fourth Grade, Fourth/Fifth/Sixth Combo

This worksheet asks the student to name the artist and title of the work, then begin to examine the work. The questions direct students to look and define the work, think about art elements, and describe their feelings toward the work.

<u>RESULTS</u>

This guide sheet required good reading skills, as well as knowledge about line, color, and pattern. Many of the students struggled with the reading and understanding of the guide sheet. Each grade level has a separate guide sheet. I use the sheet once or twice a year with each class. Each time the students have trouble understanding what to do, and how they should answer.

FREE CHOICE WORK
Classes Involved: Second Grade of 24 students

This was a session to paint whatever you desired. The class had 35 minutes to begin and complete a tempera painting. No sketching or previous drawing was available. Each table had red, yellow, blue, black, and white tempera paint; two buckets of water wash; and paper towels. Each student had three paint brushes, #2 round brush, #8 round brush, and a one inch flat brush; 12 X 18 inch white paper, and a paper towel. Students were instructed to fill the page. To encourage students to consider the background, I requested that no white paper should show.

The weeks before this session were about teaching color and painting techniques. First lesson was primary colors to secondary colors. Second lesson was adding white to a color to make it light. Third lesson was adding black to a color to make it dark, also adding "spice," or a small amount of bright or contrasting colors to create interest.

RESULTS

Many of the students started with familiar symbols such as hearts, rainbows, and stars and then painted around them.

One student, Jonathan, started with the edge and used one color for a stroke, cleaned the brush, another for a stroke, clean the brush; until he was around the entire paper. These colors were very clean and clear. On the inside of his painting were bold vertical patterned lines on one side, then horizontal lines on the other side. These lines showed pattern, light colors, and dark colors. Jonathan's painting was bold, strong, and seemed very deliberate. I asked him if he was thinking of a painting he knew or what his idea was. His response was, "I was just painting."

Another student, Wynetta, used a different technique from the majority of the class. She painted the whole paper blue. After thinking a moment, while the paint dried, she painted an octopus hanging from six strings, and other details. I was impressed by the boldness of her painting on fresh blue paint while retaining the clear colors of her subject. Wynetta's work demonstrated lines to define the image, patterns for detail, and control of color.

My overall impression of this painting session is that students understood line variety. A number of paintings showed lines as an area of interest instead of shapes or colors. There were 24 students in the class, but six students did not have work. I looked at 18 paintings. I was surprised that students employed elements from previous lessons, even though many weeks had elapsed since those lessons. Many students remembered how to wash the brush and to mix colors. Attention to the background and color mixing was weak in the students' overall work, though. 10 students showed evidence of strong line design, even though the lesson on line design was 5 months prior to the free draw session.

GOLDEN PENCIL ASSORTED PAPER REFLECTION SHEET
Classes Involved: First Grade, Third Grade, Fourth Grade, Fifth/ Sixth Grade, Sixth Grade

The"Golden Pencils Assorted Papers" were created to be used during an artist-in-residency. The artist wanted each student in our school to have a personal collection of papers to create a collage from which to write a Haiku poem.

During the month before the residency I had stations featuring different techniques used to decorate and color paper. Stations:

marbleizing, finger paint with scratch tool, finger paint with mat board, splatter paint, blown paint, crayon rubbings of texture, finger paint on colored tissue paper, printing with found objects, blob paint and fold, wet watercolor, spin paint, plastic wrap with paint, and hand/object printing. Each student had 12 or more papers by the time of the residency. The classroom teacher allowed students time to "free associate" with their papers and generate a list of describing words using the papers as visual stimuli.

The stations were very popular with all grade levels. The fast pace kept everyone's interest. I had concerns about the learning of art concepts in these sessions. I developed a reflection sheet that asked students to select their favorite piece of paper, describe that piece, explain why it was their favorite, talk about it in terms of art, and state what they learned from making the paper. I used the sheet with first graders as a class discussion with me acting as recorder. The other classes wrote their responses.

RESULTS

The first grade was able to select a favorite piece and tell why it was their favorite. 3 students described different lines, "squiggly lines," "orange lines," and "snakes." 7 students used color as a reason for their choice. Pattern was not mentioned. Dots and designs were mentioned as descriptives and many students saw places or creatures in their papers. 21 students said that they learned something from the station activity.

The classes that wrote reflection comments also gave a variety of responses. These reflection sheets gave me a lot of information. Ideas that I had stressed months or years before were mentioned by students. These reflection sheets indicate a lot about what each student is getting from my teaching. This adds another dimension to learning.

THE ART REPORT
Classes Involved: Second/Third/Fourth Combo, Third/Fourth Combo, Fourth Grade,Fifth Grade, Fifth/Sixth Combo, Sixth Grade

The Art Report goes out to parents twice a year, first in January and then in June. All the Bennington District Schools use the same form.

E - excellent *VG* - very good *S* - satisfactory *U* - unsatisfactory

	E	VG	S	U
1. Displays a positive attitude about art				
2. Understands art concepts				
3. Thinks creatively				
4. Follows instructions				
5. Respects own work				
6. Handles tools and equipment properly				
7. Behaves and cooperates				

Remarks:

The faculty at Molly Stark is starting to use goal setting with subject evaluations. Each teacher is doing his or her own method of goal setting with students. I asked students to write a goal and include it on the Art Report. During the goal setting session, they also rated themselves on the 7 aspects of the report as designated by an asterix. I read all the students goals then also marked the Art Report observations with a check mark.

RESULTS

Second/Third/Fourth Combo - no comments on line, color, or pattern

Goals were:	Draw Better	7
	Paint better	2
	Listen better	2
	Be good	2
	Love art	1
	Be creative	1

Third/Fourth Combo - One comment on line, color, and pattern

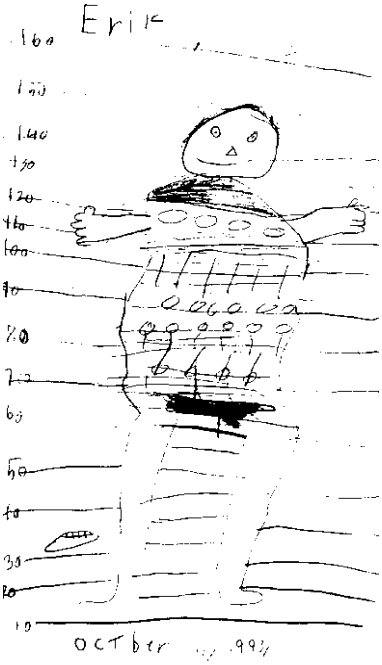
Goals were:	Draw better	3
	Participate more	3
	Become better artist	1
	Follow directions	1
	Make better pictures	1
	Be happy	1
	Listen	1
	Not be messy	1
	Keep doing good	1
	Sew better	1
	Behave better	1
	Work faster	1
	Sit still	1
	Unreadable	2

Fourth Grade,Fifth Grade, Fifth/Sixth Combo, Sixth Grade - one comment on line, 2 comments on color, none on pattern, and 2 comments on using line, color, and pattern

Goals were:	Draw better	17
	Listen better	10
	Be creative	8
	Complete Work	7
	Work faster	4
	Do better art	4
	Like my art	4
	Participate more	2
	Paint better	2
	Behave better	2
	Love art more	2
	Respect more	2
	Be a better artist	2
	Get good grades	2
	Help others	2
	Write better	1
	Try better	1
	Work harder	1
	Do marbelizing	1
	Do Fimo beads	1
	Ease up	1
	Do own activities	1
	Take more time	1
	Organize better	1
	Be responsible	1
	Shade better	1
	Have more fun	1

The Art Report goal setting gave me a better idea of what the students thought they should focus on. So many of their goals were not about art. The goals on drawing and creativity seemed appropriate. The focus on line, color, and pattern may have been too specific for this age.

Analysis/Synthesis



1. Self-Portrait on Student Portfolio. The students used line to define their ideas. Many of the lines lacked thickness or thinness. The students allowed the pencil to control the width. there were many examples of curving and jagged lines, which was part of the line lesson. I have focused on line variety more this year and I see the evidence. In 1994-95 more students increased using variety of line than in 1993-94. Pattern was commonly used in 1993-94 and 1994-95 self-portraits. Color was not a factor in this item.

Past learning with line and pattern appears present. The ten-minute time factor seems to limit any depth to line and pattern.

2. Guide for Evaluating Art Work. The students could recognize line, pattern, and color on their work, then mark the fact on the guide sheet. The problem I saw with the guide sheet was lack of specific information about line, pattern, or color. This sheet does help the student identify artist and title, and then begin to examine artwork. This process is very beneficial, whether with the younger or older students' own work, a master artist's work, or peer work. I did gain understanding of student's development from their answers on past learning on the back of the guide, question #7.

3. Free Choice Work. This was a tremendous method for detecting past learning about line, pattern, and color. Painting as a medium offers so many choices, specifically with line and color. Having a selection of brush sizes and paint color make variety of line and color demonstrating readily available. When a student lacked understanding about line and/or color, it was very obvious.

4. Golden Pencil Assorted Paper Reflection Project. This reflection sheet was more informative than the guide sheet. Students used their own words to answer the questions. The vocabulary used by students gave me so much knowledge of where they were in the learning process with art, writing, and reading. The process of making the paper, working with a guest teacher, and making the collage and haiku poem were wonderful. The collage

showed the students' learning of line from their cut papers as well as from the writing on the reflection sheet, and this was exciting for me.

5. The Art Report. The goal setting on the Art Report did not include many comments on line, pattern, or color, but were more general to school and behavior. This activity did not help me understand about students' learning about line, pattern, or color. I did gain insight to students' individual learning goals, however, which helps me understand their development.

The various ways in which students gain knowledge are important. The students' artwork during the lesson begins the process of learning; examination and reflection bring the learning to greater depth.

The problem I see with many of these processes is time. I want more time to teach, more time to practice, more time to assess. The students need the time for a variety of activities so they gain understanding. Another problem is refinement of process. The self-portrait session might be enhanced with more time than ten minutes, especially for the older students.

Both the Guide for Evaluating Art Work and the Art Report need language the students understand and can easily respond to.

I intended to use the same classes for all five projects, but interruptions to the art schedule made that impossible.

I feel the students are all learning and making progress. Some students show past learning in the artwork. Other students may relate learning on the reflection sheets. My question to myself: Would it be more beneficial to have fewer art activities each year and spend more time with examination and reflection?

Epilogue

The benefits of the critique sessions with Sally took many forms for me. Having other art teachers look at my artwork helped to build my confidence and solved several technique problems. I brought my action research material to one session and the dialogue helped me to continue. Mostly the discussions about art helped me see my own passion for art education.

I brought photographs to the last critique session of a mural project I did at Halifax School, a small K-8 school where I was an artist-in-residence during off days from Molly Stark. All the students

worked together with me to complete a wall mural. This experience was rewarding; the students and teachers saw the work from beginning to end. The high focus and constant visibility have great power. What kind of power, I am not sure. My feelings about the experience were overwhelming. To share that with a group like a critique group made me want to do more public art work, like the Halifax School mural.

This action research project and critique group did affect the way I think about my work in the classroom. It made me stretch my thinking. Normally I feel the art activities should be the main focus: the more art activities, the better. Now I feel the art activities should be carefully selected for specific development and learning, then examination and reflection added to better complete the learning growth.

Linda Tuscano
Proctor Junior-Senior High School
Proctor VT

Setting

Proctor is a small school with just over 200 students at this time. Students develop appreciation for the arts as a result of systemic introduction to various media within the context of history. Specific skills and materials are presented as needed and processes are integrated with other content areas when appropriate.

Currently art classes are 50 minutes long. One group, grades 9-12, meet daily for one semester with an option to elect a second semester. Two other groups are scheduled to met alternately for one semester with an option to elect a second semester. They earn half of the high school credit as the first group does. Middle school students meet every day for one marking period. Four different groups of students are instructed in the visual arts each year at this level. The art room is also available to students during their free time throughout the day, which we call "studio time." This is my first year as a teacher in this particular school, so the scheduling issues are still being addressed as part of a school-wide strategic plan.

The art room is quite adequate, with plenty of storage space for two- and three-dimensional work. Students have many tables to work at. They have access to a large kick-wheel and kiln for pottery and a small etching press and various tools for printmaking, as well as easels and drawing boards for painting. There is a computer with graphic software and shelves of diverse found and collected materials for collage and assemblage.

The teachers and administration provide a great deal of support for all the arts programs. Effort is made to integrate topics when it is appropriate. Many parents seem to be interested in the quality of instruction in the arts and have shared their concerns with the administration as well as with the teachers.

Guiding Question

The question that I have addressed throughout this year as part of this action research project has been: What kinds of activities will have the greatest influence for motivating high school students to invest personal information in the artwork that they produce? I would like to know when students are working to

satisfy the requirements for an assignment and when they are working to communicate a personal idea. My goal is to help students to become aware of the differences of intention in the preparation of their artwork. I feel that this awareness is a crucial point in an artist's development and it may be just as crucial for the development of the audience.

Learning the processes of reflective questioning and critique have been essential for assisting my students to develop the awareness of intention. On personal levels, through the recording of experiences as journal entries, written responses to reflective questions, and comments made in critique discussion, these students have become aware of why they have made certain decisions in their artwork. With more opportunity to articulate these discoveries they may begin to realize their importance.

Approach

The organization of each teaching unit has evolved throughout the year as a result of trying new ideas. By the close of the year each unit consisted of several components through which students earned points for a grade.

Each project was introduced as a lecture and discussion to present historical and cultural information. Examples of professional work were viewed, and reading assignments provided details about the techniques developed by artists. Once a goal or problem was established as a result of examining the background information, students used several class sessions for experimentation with media and technique. They then decided on a final piece to complete.

Students wrote journal entries when they completed each experimental activity as part of the process. They also produced written responses to a set of reflective questions throughout the process. These responses were often more general than the journal entries and were supposed to encourage an overview of the discoveries made in the journal entries and experimental activities.

The entire packet was turned in along with the final project as a record of how each student had progressed from the beginning to the end of each unit. A vocabulary list was also completed. All final projects were then displayed in front of the group and discussed in terms of problem solutions, achievement of goals, and communication of personal ideas.

Some of the units completed using this format included:

Multi-media Collage
Problem: How to create a unified image using many different materials?
Students needed to decide what art elements they would apply to an art principle to unify their piece.

Abstract Painting
Problem: What makes an abstract painting different than a canvas that appears to have paint put on it in any old way?
Students used a collection of prepared practice activities to introduce specific concepts and techniques that could be incorporated into the production of an abstract painting.

Pastel Drawings of Action Figures or Self-Portrait
Problem: How and why did artists of the Renaissance period produce realistic images of people?
One group worked with skeletal proportion to produce gesture drawings, and the other group worked with a mirror to observe facial features.

These three units represent approximately 12 weeks of work for my students as well as some of the best examples of reflective activity. All of them were successful, with the pastel drawings coming the closest to answering my original research question.

Students were motivated to work on these projects. Journal entries included thoughtful observations about the drawings done at home as well as in class. They also requested that group critiques occur while their work was "in progress," and began to discuss their work with each other, seeking feedback or suggestions, or asking "What's wrong with this section?".

Overall we were all satisfied with the efforts and results from these final drawings and many of the students felt they had invested some personal information in this process.

Analysis/Synthesis

Part of the success of this unit is the result of taking the time to teach students about assessment. They have begun to understand that reflecting about their work is crucial to its development. They realize the need to learn to articulate the responses that they have when they view artwork. They know they need

time to practice how to discuss artwork and to learn the vocabulary that is essential to these discussions.

One of my greatest concerns about these assessment activities is that of a scoring method. I plan to work on unifying the point awards to produce meaningful scores for the various methods in each unit packet. I also hope to be able to videotape the critique sessions for the purposes of scoring the discussion and having students critique their performances.

Epilogue

A goal that has developed from my critique sessions with Sally is to learn to facilitate a critique session with some of the expertise that she has demonstrated. I work to develop questions and comments that are thought-provoking as well as constructively critical and, hopefully, helpful to my students. Like all of the other components of this process, it takes time and practice to perfect this skill.

I have found that this critique group has allowed me to stay in touch with some of the feelings that my students experience when they take part in the reflective questions or the critique discussion. This helps me to be more effective when I attempt to address their feelings and thoughts as well as look at their artwork.

Appendix: Linda Tuscano

Your Name _____

Name of Project _____

Project Goals:

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS SHEET: Answer the following questions as you work on your project. Remember to write all of your thoughts and ideas as they come to you. You may use a sketch or picture when needed. BE AWARE of possible stories or poems as you write, and feel free to turn the paper over to continue an idea.

BEGINNING

What questions do you have about this project?

What other information do you need?

What will you try first?

DURING

What practice was most helpful?

How did you get your idea?

What about tools and materials?

END

How did you get your final piece?

What more would you like to do? Can you do it now?

Continued on page 44

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

How does your work explain a time period in history, an idea, a feeling, a way of life?

What might this art work have to do with your life at the present?

Susan C. Galusha
Sherburne Elementary School
Plymouth Elementary School
Sherburne & Plymouth VT

Introduction

The art program that I am responsible for is predominantly concerned with art making. Work is mainly two-dimensional, with an emphasis on drawing and especially painting. Each year we also do sculpture, bas relief, a creative sewing project, mask-making, weaving, a kindergarten and sixth grade acrylic mural, and clay work. Work is often in a cultural, social, historical, art history, or environmental context, and very often there is a personal context. Using art prints, at the beginning of each lesson there is either a brief discussion on specific artists or an "I Spy" game examining the print for items that begin with a specific letter.

My aim is for each child to think of him/herself as an artist, and for the art program to enhance students' self-confidence and self-esteem by providing a safe place to take chances and to show other sides of themselves. I believe it is the responsibility of art educators to give those students who are predominantly right-brained—the visually and spatially dominant—an opportunity to shine within the school community. All students should have at least one piece of their own work on display in the school at all times.

Setting

I teach art in two different elementary schools. Sherburne Elementary is a small, rural school with 130 students. Each class has between 17 and 22 students, kindergarten to sixth grade. There is one class per grade. Kindergarten to second grades have a 30-minute art class once a week. Third and fourth grades have 40 minutes, fifth grade has 50 minutes, and the sixth grade has 55 minutes. Students have the option of coming to the art room to work during their half-hour recess on art day.

The art room is a large, windowed room at the far end of the school where we can talk and play music without fear of disturbing others. There are many storage spaces, a large sink, a blackboard, bulletin boards, a permanent slide projector screen, and a VCR. This room is shared officially with the music teacher and the French teacher (me). Unofficially, during and after school this room is almost always in use.

Because of the art work that is always prominently displayed, parents, visitors, and teachers often notice and make positive comments. My principal always introduces me with pride to visitors or prospective parents. She tells them that we are so lucky to have "a real artist" as our art teacher. The teachers are cooperative, but there is no structure for coordinating what goes on in the art program with what is happening in the classroom. Occasionally a teacher will make a specific request, and I either explain how to do something or do it for them. There is definitely a feeling that the art program enhances the whole school community. I have been on the Instructional Support Team (IST) since its inception, as an advocate for students who seem to excel in the arts but struggle elsewhere.

Plymouth Elementary, where I work one-half day per week, has a total school population of 24 students in two classes: kindergarten through second grades, and third through sixth grades. The art room is also the library, music room, and meeting room, and houses all the AV equipment and the school phone. The result is a few too many interruptions and distractions—for me more than for the students. Working with the mixed-age groups is interesting, and the best part is that the older class has an hour and a half for art. The teachers are very flexible, and allow a longer class time if needed. At Sherburne, I must keep to a very tight schedule.

At Plymouth I start both groups with a drawing exercise in our sketchbooks. This is followed by our "art history" or technique discussion; then we start our actual art-making, in a context. The students are familiar with the procedure and work seriously for the allotted time. Because of the class size and the length of time we have together, the results are very positive, with helpful student-to-student interactions in the third-to-sixth-grade class.

There is a need to expose students to the process of reflection and critique to help them improve their own work and to work independently. Also, this process should help students develop the skills of seeing, describing, interpreting, and analyzing artwork.

Guiding Question

How can an opportunity be created for students to reflect and critique their own work in such a way that they will be able to act upon the suggestions and, in class, make final adjustments to their work? I hope that through this process the students will learn to rely less on my suggestions and advice and to trust their own judgment more. I believe that most artists end up working inde-

pendently, and we have to learn to trust our own judgment.

Approach

Action Plan

1. Develop a list of questions to help the reflection/critique process.

2. In order to teach the skills and to understand the questions, have students practice answering the list of questions below in their art journals, based on an emotionally neutral piece of art—a piece belonging to the teacher or a reproduction.

3. Students will work in groups of two to four to critique each other's work, using the list of questions and recording the responses in their journals.

4. In the following lesson the students will record their responses to their own work, using the list of questions.

5. The students' work will be photographed before and after the critique session, so they can see what changes have taken place as a result of the reflection/critique process.

There will be two ways to measure change: the journals and the photographs.

Questions:
1. What do you see? What is happening here?
2. Where is the focus or most important part of the piece?
3. How does the artist draw your attention to that area?
4. What is the artist trying to say? What feelings are being expressed?
5. Is this work successful?
6. What areas needs more work, and/or is this piece finished? How will you know that it is finished?

Context: The Art Project

Essentially, there were three components to this project. First, students had their initial experience working in acrylics on a canvas board, so they had to learn how to handle the materials—how to blend colors and apply paint without muddying up the colors.

Second, this painting was a night scene. The students had to develop their own peopled landscape or seascape, and at the same time try to express a mood or feeling. They were asked to pay special attention to the way light was directing the viewer's at-

tention to the center of interest from the light source. Also, there was a discussion of advancing and receding colors as well as perspective.

Third, students were asked to keep a journal of responses to the questions that I dictated. The journals contain their reflections and self-critique comments.

Collected Information

The students had an opportunity to practice the new skill of critical viewing by looking at, talking about, and then writing about a "night painting" I had done many years ago. We also looked at "night paintings" by Van Gogh and Rembrandt. The students responded in their journals, then produced initial sketches for their own paintings.

Analysis/Synthesis

Time and continuity are always a problem. I tried to relieve the pressure I put on myself by giving an extra week to this process: doing less but doing it better. So, more time was spent preparing for the actual painting part of the project. After spending two weeks (two 55-minute periods), students had an opportunity to critique each other's work in small groups of three or four. Several students were surprised to learn that the scenes that they had painted were not so easily understood by the others. The "What do you see?" question elicited discussion and suggestions from their peers.

It was a pleasure to see that most of the students took the painting as well as the critiquing very seriously. They had an opportunity to rework their paintings after the small group critique and again after the final personal critique. I did find that there were students who should have put additional time and effort into their pieces but, because their friends had completed their own work to their satisfaction, they just shut down and were not willing to put in any more effort. So there are questions about attention span and about accepting and acting on other people's suggestions. Certainly the students are free to accept or reject the advice of their peers or their teacher, and hopefully no one's self-image is damaged by the process.

Reflecting on the process, it seems that I asked a great many things from my students. But my aim was to have them think and work and respond as artists, and producing artwork is truly a complex business.

A new piece for me was a checklist we developed—a continuation of the reflection process—designed to answer the question, "How do you know when the piece is finished?"

Are there at least three layers of paint on the canvas, and no white canvas spots showing?

Is there a light source?

Is there perspective? Do objects go from large to small?

Do colors go from bright to dull?

Is there a variety of lines and shapes?

Is this piece as successful as you are able to make it?

Almost all students wrote in their journals that they would know when their paintings were finished when someone else could tell what it was that they had painted and when they answered "yes" to the final checklist. Additional significant comments included the following:

When I feel satisfied with my work.

When people think it looks good and when I think it looks good.

When I think it reaches my expectations and will show my ability to the greatest.

When there are enough layers and it looks great.

When it is what I want.

I enjoyed reading what the students wrote in their journals and responding back to them in writing. This is one way that everyone can be heard.

It was impressive to see students using art vocabulary such as "negative space" and interpreting mood and intent in their journals. Writing about intent helps students clarify, for themselves and for me, what they are trying to express in their paintings. Choosing a title for their work does this in another way.

The whole critique process adds such an element of seriousness to the art-making process. There is something simple but pure about a statement in a journal, "When people look at my art I feel good." In retrospect, I can see the value of this whole process, critiquing an emotionally safe or neutral piece orally, then in a journal.

Epilogue

I feel this whole process was extremely successful because it models what I perceive to be the true artistic process in which a practicing artist/painter engages. This was my aim: to provide students with a complete and authentic experience—thinking and working in an artistic mode. The paintings that resulted were pretty wonderful, too.

Nancy Cressman
Thetford Elementary School
Thetford VT

Introduction

I decided to participate in the Vermont Arts Assessment Project because it would give me a chance to focus on assessment, a facet of my teaching that I have always felt I had more questions about than answers.

I have been teaching art for eleven years at the Thetford Elementary School. My reporting on student progress until now started and stopped with winter and spring written reports on each child. The reports included a summary of concepts taught and projects done and a numerical assessment of each student for things such as fulfilling cleanup responsibilities and creative use of color, line, and composition (see Attachment A). The reporting is time consuming, usually 12 hours per term. Also, I am aware that judgments were based on my "sense of the child" rather than on specific evidence I could trace. I think the sense-of-the-child approach is probably fine for my youngest students, the kindergarten through second-graders; however, for the older students, considering the current climate of accountability and my own desire to trace their progress, something more was needed.

I think I had come to these realizations about a year ago. I was simultaneously excited and paralyzed. So, for me, it was very timely that the Arts Assessment Project was getting off the ground. Within its structure, I found a manageable way to address some of my questions, but also feel the support of knowing that I didn't need to solve the whole problem. I liked thinking throughout the year that there were many of us across the state asking our "action research questions" and that eventually the collected wealth of knowledge would come my way.

The part that paralyzed me was thinking of how to create a paper trail for the large number of students I see each week. What I am most happy to share is that my research led me to a model that makes this seem feasible and which I am going to try to implement on a wider scale next year. The two most important elements of this model are that the paper trail is created by the students themselves and that reflection on their work becomes in and of itself a learning experience.

Setting

I teach 300 kindergarten through sixth-grade students once a week at the Thetford Elementary School. I work three days per week. Kindergarten classes are one-half hour, first- and second-grade classes are 40 minutes, and third- through sixth-grade classes are 45 minutes each. My schedule allows a preparation period each day. In some cases there is time between classes and in some cases classes come back-to-back.

We meet in the Arts Room, which I share with the music teacher, the CAPS Program, and the After School Program. The room has two sinks, both of which are out of reach for kindergartners and most first-graders. The floor is tile, which is great for the messy nature of some of our projects. The room has one window. I have adequate storage for materials and barely adequate storage for student projects. My materials budget, excluding construction paper and tempera paint, is two dollars per student per year.

The Thetford Elementary School is characterized by a long-standing commitment to a developmental approach to learning. We strive for individualized instruction designed to meet various learning styles. Our school supports developing integrated curriculum when possible. In general, I collaborate with every teacher on at least one major unit each year. We have also made a school commitment to multi-age classrooms. We believe in experience-based learning that actively involves students in the learning process.

There is significant support for the arts in general and the visual arts specifically. This support is demonstrated by parents who are weekly volunteers in my classes and who give volunteer hours to mount exhibits and performances; by our principal who develops the schedule and encourages professional growth and collaboration with classroom teachers; and by the school board, who this past year added additional time to my contract and protected the arts room from becoming a regular classroom. Our school is experiencing significant overcrowding, and I am thankful to still have my room. We also have significant repair bills ahead of us, for in an effort to preserve programs and staff during recent budget cycles the School Board postponed much needed repairs to the building. We have a failed septic system which means that we cannot expand on our present site. With the uncertainties ahead of us, I am glad to be in such a strong position at present. I greatly appreciate the support for my program.

Guiding Question

My question grew out of an interest in assessment in general and reflection in particular. I wanted to figure out if students found reflection valuable, and if so, how to do it in a way that was manageable with my time constraints and that would provide a learning experience for them.

Reflection for the purposes of my study is defined as a class period devoted to discussing student artwork once the projects are completed. I want the assessment process to remain student-based. In so doing, it is my hope students will learn that thinking about what they have accomplished is an integral part of the total project. I also do not think it is realistic for art teachers to take on piece-by-piece assessment of process and product. Given present time constraints, it is not feasible and I question the connection or helpfulness for student learning.

My action research question was: What is the value of reflection to fifth- and sixth-grade students? And, following that, the question to myself as teacher was: How do I structure the reflection so that the students learn from the experience? I wanted to figure out a way to pass the responsibility of reporting on their work from me to them. I wanted to help them develop the vocabulary and analysis skills necessary to determine their own progress. I am committed to this because I believe art is very personal, so that although I can ask for certain concepts to be incorporated into a piece, determining what was learned along the way can best be determined by the maker.

One of the reasons I struggled over assessment so in the past was a feeling that I could not possibly give fair evaluation to the number of students I see. I felt uncomfortable being asked to make a judgment on something I did not have full knowledge of, but simultaneously, it was my role to have such knowledge. I think it is only after teaching so many years that I can identify and reveal the discomfort coming from such a contradiction. I think all art teachers must share this problem. We do not see the children enough to know their progress in detail. In defining my original action research question, I think I was still looking to see if all the change and work necessary would matter to student learning, or if the results of more involved reporting might end up in files, unread.

I have taught my 84 fifth- and sixth-grade students at Thetford Elementary since they were in kindergarten. These students meet with me once a week for 45 minutes. I addressed my study to them because they seemed a good group to begin with—in part because of their ages and in part because of the type of learning

environments already established by the homeroom teachers of the four combined fifth and sixth grades: Paul Munn, Lynn McRae, Bonnie Irwin and Joe Minichiello. All four of these teachers have Critical Skills Training and I had a feeling some elements of that approach could be very useful in our reflection session.

Approach

I decided my Action Research Plan would be to give students reflection opportunities for two different projects. Following this, all students would be given a questionnaire that would try to get to the heart of the value of the reflection sessions to student learning. The reflection sessions were one period long at the conclusion of two five-week projects.

Action Research Plan

WEEK 1: Spend one period reflecting on a completed cray pas drawing assignment. Assignment summary: Create a picture showing the intensity of the rain forest. Students were asked to select half of the color wheel and limit their pallet to the analogous colors of the selected section. Students were asked to overlap parts of the composition with other parts and to blend colors.

Reflection Question: What did you want this picture to show, and what did you do artistically to convey what you wanted to show? Basically tell us how this picture evolved.

Description of Process: This kind of open discussion of student work was a new experience in the art room. Students were very eager to share their pieces. We were able to cover about eight students in the 45 minutes. Part of my purpose was to keep directing the students to the original goals of the projects and to see how consciously they could discuss them in relationship to their artwork. The quality of the work was incredible. Every student's picture was displayed in the hall. I worried that the students would be disappointed not to be making something during the class devoted to discussion. I am conscious that the time we spend talking is subtracted from the time the students have for making. This is partly why I am so concerned that the reflection periods be valuable to them. Spending a period discussing work did not seem to upset them.

WEEK 2: Introduce new drawing assignment. Students were told that when the assignment was concluded they would be spending a period sharing their work with the whole class and reflect-

ing on their pieces. They were told they would be asked to stand in front of their classmates and answer these questions: What media did you use? How did you integrate the collage piece with your setting? Is there anything else you would like to tell us? Lastly, they would ask the class for any "I see . . ." or "I like . . ." comments.

Assignment: The goal of this assignment is for students to create a piece of artwork which is multimedia (collage plus two other media), integrating the collage element and the context to create either an absurd or realistic picture. The content is of their own choice. Students will be asked to choose an image cut out from a magazine which has been cut in half and trimmed so that it is free of context. Students will be asked to complete the second half of the image in a realistic manner and then create a background context for their image. Students will be asked to use at least two media, selecting from cray pas, color pencil, pastels, watercolor, ink, etc.

WEEKS 3 through 5: Students continue work.

WEEK 6: Reflection Period. Students will be given a written questionnaire to fill out in their homerooms:

1. Please describe the goals of the assignment. For example, what were you asked to include in your picture?

2. Which parts of your picture did you like? Which parts would you change if you had more time?

3. Please explain what you learned from sharing your work during the reflection period.

4. What do you need to feel proud of your work?

Analysis/Synthesis

During the reflection period my principal, Sheila Moran, was observing my class. I had asked her to observe the first class where I launched the collage assignment and then this last period of the unit devoted to reflection. During the reflection period, students' names were drawn from a bucket and those drawn were asked to present their pieces. During their short presentations, students were asked to address the reflection questions introduced during Week 2. The questions were displayed for students to reference.

There were two problems immediately evident with this process. First, we did not have enough time to see every student's work, and second, for a few students paying attention for that long, even though the presenters changed, was not possible. It became apparent that for a few kids the process was not engaging enough. The majority seemed attentive and very eager to discuss the artwork. Please see Sheila Moran's Evaluation Report (Attachment B) for a full description of the class.

In an effort to address those two problems I spoke with both Sheila Moran and Bonnie Irwin. Sheila had written several suggestions, including dividing the class into small groups as a way of having everyone share. Bonnie made two suggestions based on Cooperative Learning and Critical Skills techniques. First, she suggested that a check sheet be given to each student during the reflection period. The sheet would list the goals of the assignment and give each student a chance to evaluate his or her own project in relation to those goals. This creates the paper trail of specifics I was concerned about in my reporting to parents of progress. It also meets the important goal of having the students learn from the reflection/evaluation process. Bonnie shared with me several of the check sheets she has developed for science projects. The sheets always ask the students to evaluate their own performance.

Second, Bonnie felt that modeling the reflection process with the whole group, even if everyone does not present, would be good practice early in the year. She suggested later in the year it would work well to break into small groups, once the model is in place. My intention is to start with this in the fall. I would like to keep working with reflection and see if I can hone my skills so that the students are having the fullest learning experience possible.

My plan is to structure the major units for third- through sixth-grade study with a reflection period at the conclusion. The reflection periods will include a personal check sheet, which will be passed to me and serve as documentation for my reporting to parents. I hope students will become articulate presenters who fully command the language and concepts of the visual arts, and that they will learn from careful looking at the work of fellow students. I hope respect for the making process will grow as we devote time to sharing our work. And lastly, I hope such an evaluation process will encourage each student to take more and more responsibility for his or her own learning.

I read through the questionnaires and several themes repeated themselves as responses to the third and fourth questions. Many

students said that they learned from hearing the ideas of their classmates in response to their work. Many students said they need enough time, concentration, a positive attitude, and positive feedback in order to their best work. I would like to share some highlights of the responses to questions 3 and 4:

Question 3. Please explain what you learned from sharing your work during the reflection period.

I learned that other people like the same things I did.

I did not show my work. But I learned a lot from watching other people, like it was hard for people, and if you work hard you come out with something great.

I learned that you can learn things about your picture that you never intended.

What I learned from sharing my work was what the picture looked like to others.

I learned about the process of others' art work and got ideas for another project.

I learned that there are many different way to complete one as signment.

Question 4. What do you need to feel proud of your work?

I need time above all. I also need to be my own critic and have as much freedom as possible.

You need to work on stuff you like to feel proud of your work.

I need to have people clap at the end of my sharing.

To feel proud of my art work I need to do the best that I know I can do, and use my skills and imagination.

Epilogue

Being part of the Vermont Arts Assessment Project has been very valuable to my teaching for many reasons. First, I have met many art teachers from around the state whom I did not know prior to this. Second, I was introduced to Action Research, which I feel is a very accessible and useful model for teachers in the field. I look forward to continuing to draw on it for further professional development. Third, I met head-on a challenge that was important for me to address: that of how to evaluate and report student progress in art.

I did not fully participate in the critique sessions. I felt Sally Warren was a great resource to us, but the Montpelier-area group never really jelled. I am sorry for that missed opportunity.

Appendix: Nancy Cressman

Appendix: Nancy Cressman

Evaluation Report: Nancy Cressman
March 31, 1995

Nancy's professional development focus this year has been on her research on, and practice of, effective assessment of art instruction. She had asked that I observe two classes, the first which launched a unit, and then the final one in which students were asked to share and reflect upon their products. The operative question in the first, introductory lesson was "How does Nancy's language serve to create the openness she desires for the children in their work?" In the second, closure session the observation question was, "What evidence was there that the children were expressing increased interest and new knowledge in their reflections upon their own work and the work of others?"

In our preconference Nancy explained that the exercise itself, which she anticipated would take at least three sessions, was to have the children have a "layered experience" in which they would move from one medium to another. She expected that they would begin with a drawing activity which, by being individualized would lead to individualized selection of other media in which to work. Nancy's hope was that her own language would create the openness necessary for children to feel free to express themselves in their own way. Nancy further wanted to demonstrate respect for the children's choice of direction of their own projects.

As she presented the assignment, she selected her language very carefully. Even so, it never felt strained — just attentive to detail and how it was being received. Nancy proceeded through the following steps:

- an overview of how long the project might take
- what each lesson/work session would probably look like
- the expectations of the lesson itself
    - make sure you use at least two media
    - choose half a picture and draw a realistic second half
    - create a setting, which may be realistic or not.

All this happened at a gentle, but firm pace, so that the lesson moved along in an effective manner. Nancy did an extraordinary job talking the language of openness, and inviting individual freedom of expression from the children.

During that day's post conference, I suggested that Nancy question about how well she used her own language to introduce the lesson for maximum openness was more likely about how to bring children into the reflective conversation about their work. We spoke later about how Nancy could, another time, create even more openness through modeling reflection. The children could, from the beginning, ask and rephrase their own questions. They could practice originating questions within

Continued on page 60

their small groups. They could bring closure to the day's lesson, again in their small groups, by sharing their artistic purposes and choices.

Other tricks for turning the children into more reflective talkers (and since we are wired to organize our thinking when we talk, this would increase the quantity and quality of thought about art as well) in conversation could include:

• actually carve out time for silence and work, and then time specifically for looking and talking
• enter what heard from the children by way of questions and observations in class journal/wall chart. This could prime the pump for some
• in small groups, pairs, or even as individuals, keep reflective journal
• allow time to circulate to see what others are doing and to ask questions about artistic choices.

We also talked about what to do for the three or four children who had a very difficult time selecting the picture from which they were to begin the project. These children, as a result, had virtually no time to begin work. We thought that anticipating this possibility at the beginning of the lesson would make it possible to say up front, that only so much time was being allowed for that portion of the lesson, that students who had not made a selection by such and such a time would have a selection made for them.

During the second lesson, held after the children had completed their truly beautiful products, the children were given a full period to present and discuss the works. Nancy's question of me was to see what degree of interest was apparent and how much knowledge they had acquired. While I did as much of that as I could, I found myself interested in ways to refine and extend the language experience to expand upon the culture of reflection what Nancy had gotten so well started.

As for the interest level, the children began with lots of "Oh, cool!" and "Awesome!" As they looked more and talked more they clearly felt invited to be more thoughtful. They seemed especially eager to talk about those works that gave them a peek into detailed, small worlds. They increasingly used the language of art (line, composition, media, color, light, texture) to make their reflections.

Their knowledge, in turn, was also apparent. In addition to frequent use of the words mentioned above, they spoke of "blending" of "3-D effects" made by the dark-light of shadows, of an effect of distance made by receding color changes of overlapping to show contrast. They used the vocabulary of the media they selected: watercolor, pastels, tempera, papier mache, colored pencils, fine tipped markers, craypas, charcoal, glitter (to name some). They also talked about the appropriateness of titles, how words could enhance the viewers understanding of a work of art.

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Appendix: Nancy Cressman

One child was talking about “point of view” and Nancy gave him the word “perspective.”

Several of the more introspective and observant children were able to get into conversations about quite abstract qualities, including how color and other artistic choices connoted certain abstract qualities such as emotion. Even those children who could not have managed this level of dialogue were attentive and listening, clearly learning learning something unexpected from their peers’ original art work.

We spoke later about ways to make the children a little more independent of Nancy, ways which would also extend the language experience in a helpful way:

• the questions which the presenters were to address could be printed in a chart in the back of the room for the presenter to see so that Nancy did not have to prompt them
• the presenters could be asked to address the audience, not Nancy. More self possessed ones did this automatically, but others might have gotten more responses from their classmates had they been asked to make eye contact with them
• have children in the audience make “I see .....” comments instead of “I like....” comments. Again, the more thoughtful children sensed that was what was wanted, but the more literal ones never got away from that level of thought
• have children in audience have clipboards so they could write their personal “I see..” and “I like....” comments. This way some of the children who are not quick to get their hands in the air, or quick to form a reflective observation, could have more of a chance.

Once again, this was an impressive set of lessons to observe. Nancy is to be commended for her own reflective practice which has the effect of creating real artists of her children.

Appendix: Nancy Cressman

Appendix: Nancy Cressman

Julie Kuhn Fredette
Wallingford Elementary School
Wallingford VT

Introduction

Looking at, thinking about, discussing, and making art are all elements of developing an appreciation of the arts and developing one's own skill and voice as an artist. The visual art program at Wallingford Elementary School is focused on hands-on exploration of visual art through activities that develop students' perception and mastery of the elements of art: line, shape, pattern, texture, color, value, and form. These activities tie in with classroom studies when possible.

Students are introduced to the history and cultural diversity of visual art through a growing collection of art prints and art books. These resources are used to develop perception and awareness, and to inspire discussion and exploration.

Art criticism and self-assessment are concepts that are being worked into the visual art program but are still in an experimental stage. The program remains primarily focused on students' studio experience.

Setting

Art classes are currently 45 minutes for students in the K-1 combination classes through to fourth grade, 50 minutes for grade five, and one hour for grade six. The schedule moves from the youngest to the oldest students with just enough time to carry materials to each new location. The schedule is the victim of many demands and has very little flexibility.

There is no separate art classroom. The visual art program is delivered in each classroom, and the different spaces and their organization vary widely.

Guiding Question

In giving up studio/exploration time with students, it is important to know if the looking-at and thinking-about time, and discussion of critique, are adding value to students' experience. Does critique help students more fully understand the vocabulary of art and own the concepts in a way that helps them develop their own skills of visual expression? Does critique empower students to better appreciate visual art?

Hands-on experimentation is a type of experience that is important in learning. Do the visual arts lose their unique quality of nonverbal, individual-centered exploration when we institute verbal analysis? Does this process impede or foster learning? Is students' understanding deepened and their satisfaction with their artistic choices increased through the process of critique?

I centered my thinking around the possibility that using the vocabulary of art—labeling the elements perceived and their relationship within artworks—could empower students to better appreciate what they see and the range of their creative choices. The research was planned to observe sixth-graders' responses to a sculpture project. Would critique help them apply the vocabulary to their three-dimensional exploration and enhance their learning?

Approach

I decided to focus on the two sixth-grade classes in this research. Each sixth-grader had selected an animal around which to focus several projects throughout the school year. Students had time to reflect on their choice and were given time to clip resources and collect information.

First they sketched from their "file" to assimilate information and gain familiarity with their animals. Then they finished a drawing. The second project was to create a fantasy in two dimensions with their animals. Among others, we looked at prints of paintings by Marc Chagall. The last animal project was for students to create an image in three dimensions with cardboard tubes, tag board, found objects, newspaper, and a glue/water mixture. The process of building with many elements and unifying them around their animal subject was challenging, both technically and visually. Timing made this project the necessary choice for this research.

Students started their 3-D thinking by viewing a video on the last century of sculpture, "A Century Crystallized." The video is a narration of an exceptional collection of outdoor sculpture at the PepsiCo headquarters in Purchase, New York. The video takes the viewer through the changes in images over the last 100 years and their relationship to the political, social, and artistic evolution of those years. (Sixth-grade students study the 20th century in their social studies class, and the video gives some perspective.) A hand-out (appendix a) helped them begin to think about the possibilities, their preferences, and the power of sculptural imagery. We followed the viewing with a short discussion.

Videotaping seemed the most plausible method to record students' use of vocabulary, growth and change, and the impact on their work and satisfaction. It seems relevant that students had been using self-assessment sheets at the end of art class since the beginning of the school year. At the close of the marking period students calculated their average and had an opportunity to make comments and suggestions. The self-assessment form (appendix b) focused on students' behavior/actions in art class rather than on their creative process—though certainly there is a direct relationship.

In addition, the purpose and process of artistic critique and reflection was introduced through a discussion and a guide sheet (appendix c) to give students entry points and help their understanding of the value of the processes. I had also given them a worksheet to promote their thinking and planning through the sculpture process. I had planned to use this worksheet as a record of their thinking, their struggle, and their conclusions. I haven't been able to find a copy of this sheet, but essentially the questions were:

Will your piece be realistic or more abstract?

What elements of art will you emphasize (the various elements were then listed)

What feeling or emotion are you working toward (examples were then listed)

Analysis/Synthesis

At this time I will explain circumstances that acted as obstacles for me as a researcher (educator and motivator). The initiation of this project coincided with the installation/conclusion of a sculpture residency that had begun two years earlier and a puppetry artist-in-residence for K-3 students. The two sixth grades are outside in a double modular classroom. One of the classes was difficult to guide in serious, thoughtful discussion of any length or depth. The classroom organization with this same class was, at this moment in the year, unpredictable and often such that the sculpture and its process was difficult at best. The possibility of student conferencing in small or whole groups was gone. The decision to videotape became problematic as the space issue was disastrous. In addition to all the found objects, board, newspaper, glue, etc., I also needed to bring the camera and tripod.

It was physically difficult to prepare for the project and to work in the classroom space. The students' attitudes ranged from very engaged to indifferent, fairly usual for this group. It was difficult to help and encourage each student through the construction pro-

cess and promote the new process of critique. The critique research and process took a back seat to the ongoing demands and special needs of the art program.

As the sculpture project came to a close, most students had had an interesting experience and created their images through a new process. We did not critique their work, either in process or finished.

Next these students worked on possible designs for our school theme (health) T-shirt silk-screen. They created with specific criteria. After choosing their own favorite piece and displaying them as a whole, students discussed the designs in art terms and with our criteria in mind. It seemed they had gained something from this experiment even if I had not taken them through a more formal process.

At the end of the school year I asked students to write from these questions: "Did self-assessment help you change and grow? How?" Here are interesting excerpts from some of the replies:

It helped me really look at what work I accomplished in class. I took my work more seriously.

I looked at how I was working on my art stuff and noticed that I thought about it more and my stuff has come out better.

It pushed me to work harder.

I realized I should like my work more.

Because grading myself I saw how I could improve.

No, not at all.

I thought it was good because it gave us chance to grade our selves, but it wasted time that I could have been doing more things and adding more detail to my work."

Epilogue

I am intrigued and challenged by my experience within the Visual Arts Study Group. Even though this research didn't proceed as hoped, it brought new insights into the possibilities of critique and reflection as components of the art curriculum.

Perhaps because it was part of the art class structure from the year's start, self-assessment worked well for most students. With these new processes—self-assessment, critique, and reflection—all the sixth-grade students were introduced to ideas that may provide a foundation for future learning.

Appendix: Julie Kuhn FredEtte

Appendix A The Video Assessment

Artists whose pieces of sculpture I like:

Possibly sketch piece:

What did you like? Was it the simplicity
the detail
the playfulness
realistic quality
grace
strength (etc.)?

Which elements of art were important?

shapes
form (shapes in space relating to one another)
line
texture
pattern

What feeling did it convey (express to you)?

peacefulness
action - excitement
humor
strength
pain (etc.)

How did it convey that feeling?

Appendix: Julie Kuhn FredEtte

Appendix B

Self-Assessment for Art Class - How am I working? What are my strengths? What can I improve?

Week	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Cooperation Follows directions Team Work Helpful						
Respect Self Others Materials						
Uses Time Well Discussion Studio						
Problem Solving Work through Tough Spots						
Ideas and Creativity						

1 = need to improve 2 = good 3= very good

Comments:

Appendix C

The Purpose of Critique - to help you, the artist, move in the direction you want to go. Help solve problems, add to your choices.

What will help you? What will help your piece of art work?

Listen to your own art piece - it has a life of its own. Look hard - be quiet with it. We create visual art from a different place than we do most other things. Learn from your choices.

Are you ready for critique? Do you want constructive criticism or simply encouragement?

KEEP IN MIND - THIS IS YOUR PIECE OF ART WORK. You do not need to follow suggestions. Listen and learn from what others are seeing in your work.

The Elements of Design:

Line Shape Texture Pattern Color Value Space Form

Some of the Principles of Design:

Unity Balance Contrast Emphasis Rhythm

1. Describe art work using the vocabulary of the elements

2. Share ways in which the artist used the elements well to describe (in a realistic or abstract way - or to create a feeling or mood)

3. Ask if the artist has problems with the piece or questions about a certain part. Are the goals of the artist being met?

Mary Louise Marcussen
Williston Central School
Williston VT

Setting

Williston Central School, a K-8 elementary school, is divided into teams working with grades one through four, five through seven, and five through eight, and one team of grades seven and eight. The school is devoted to an integrated approach to education and embraces two recent trends in education. One seeks to utilize the philosophy and teaching of Howard Gardener through designing education to engage students of diverse learning styles and to provide an individual student plan of study as far as possible; the other seeks to address the individual's interests in achieving a quality approach to learning. The school actively pursues a process which improves these methods of engaging children in the learning process very extensively through the use of computers and other technology.

The art program offers art to students in grades one through four once a week for 45 minutes, and to grades five through eight four days a week for 45 minutes for six weeks. In general we have our own curriculum during this time, but integrate with the regular team themes whenever possible. In addition, the related arts teachers (music, gym, tech. ed., living arts, etc.) integrate with the teams to offer special projects on Wednesdays. Sometimes we do art projects in the theme the team is presently studying, and sometimes we are asked to teach something other than art, or art history. At times, art leads the way and the projects are led by our curricula or ideas—for example, texturing special papers which are used to make collages, and then putting together books and writing using the collages as inspiration for the story. We also currently offer each team an opportunity to send students one period a week for a special group project. This is called "resource time."

There are one thousand students in our school, but next year a smaller, 400-student K-4 school will be built to alleviate very crowded conditions. We have two well-equipped art rooms with an abundance of windows. We have three art teachers: I am full-time and there are two half-time teachers. Our administration is very supportive of the arts, evident in the design of the building, use of materials, stage and auditorium of professional quality, and of the emphasis on art visible throughout the building on the walls and in the showcases.

Guiding Question

The thesis that I am using in this action research project is: Starting with a specific concept that reflects a given image, students will change and develop their artwork as a result of meaningful questions and discussion, which enable them to commit to the expression of a personal image, and a process that helps them evolve and improve this image. They will also deepen their understanding of the original artwork through comparing it to their own art piece that evolves from it, and through engaging in the discussion around it.

Approach

This action research involves a multicultural masking and movement performance with a group from a five-through-seven grade team called Nova. The idea was inspired by a dance workshop at the school sponsored by the Flynn Theatre in Burlington in which several students from the team participated. A Maori group from New Zealand came to the school, shared dances with the group, and also taught them dances. These students also attended a performance at the Flynn following the workshop.

This resource group wished to design and make masks based on a Maori legend and to perform a movement piece inspired by the legend. I met with these students once a week for 45 minutes beginning in early February, culminating in a performance in early June. Often the students came in to work on their masks during their recess period, and once they received an extra hour-long period. Periods, however, were also lost to field trips and holidays, so the extent of the project had to be shortened somewhat.

Description of Procedure

I read the student a story, "The House of the People," by R. L. Bacon, illustrated by R. J. Jahnke and published in New Zealand. The faces of the people in the book are painted or tattooed with the curved spiral designs of the Maori. The story is about the building of a community meeting house, and what images will be carved, painted, and woven into parts of the house that will tell the story of the Maori people. In the story, the wise old one (myself as narrator) walks all over the country and encounters the forces, creatures, and plants that will be depicted on the meeting house. The students, in masks, would dance their characters as they are described in the story.

The images chosen by the students were Pateki, the flounder; Pakeke, the whale; Manaia, the bird-headed man monster; Marakihau, the hollow-tongued monster of the sea; Padura, the

mud hen; Rangi, the rain; Tawhirimatea, the wind; Papa, the Mother Earth; Tangaroa, the Father Sky; Kaka, the parrot; Pitau, the fern; and Punga Werewere, the spider.

Using these images as a starting point, the students built masks that not only showed the Maori influence but also incorporated their own thoughts and insights, resulting in art that expressed their own individuality and culture.

After choosing their image, the students began brainstorming how to construct a mask, and then drew the symbol and began to make sketches. They viewed masks that had been constructed and decorated in a variety of ways. During this time students were encouraged to explore and use a metacognitive watch, a "what-if" approach. Some students really experimented, while others tended to copy samples or too readily adapt suggestions from others, and started constructing without much thought. One student tried several forms and created a unique mask to represent the parrot, using elegant curved forms, large open areas, and large curved shapes to repeat the curved forms and negative spaces. The uniqueness of this mask is discussed on the video during the interviews and peer reactions.

The students also brainstormed the criteria for the project and they were written on the whiteboard.

1. The piece expresses the artist's intent clearly.
2. The piece shows a Maori origin, however insignificant.
3. The mask shows care and craftsmanship.
4. The mask shows the quality of good sculpture, and shows a variety of media integrated into a whole to serve the intent.
5. The movement used to present the mask serves the intent.
6. The writing, talking, and mask itself (or other artwork) exhibits a process of change as a result of critique and reflective discussion.

Analysis/Synthesis

The student's artwork reflected changes due to answering meaningful questions and through formal, and informal teacher-directed and peer directed inquiry.

Questions Posed

1a. A mask is like a sculpture. It must be stimulating to look at from all sides. Describe your form and the negative spaces between the forms in your mask.

1b. What feeling and idea is your mask communicating to the audience? After your movement performance, will your audience be able to tell you what you are? Is your mask symbolic? Do you need to explain it?

2a. Maori art is often symmetrical to show stability. Did you choose symmetrical or asymmetrical balance and why?

2b. Maori patterns are regular repeating patterns. Did you chose a regular pattern or a random pattern? Why? How have you used negative space in your decorating? Does the negative space help to draw attention to your pattern?

In question 1a. and 1b., the three students I followed thoroughly describe their project, and state whether the intent behind the mask will be clear to an audience or that it will need explaining. Michael looked at other cultures as well as the Maori, but states that he focused on the bird with hollow tongue which stands like a man. Katy focuses on the wind. She states here she will put "colorful" symbols and cotton balls on the mask.

In questions 2a. and 2b, students further described their masks, and other questions helped them clarify the kinds of movement they planned to do to portray their character (plant or force). They explained what the emotion was they hoped to evoke and how. As a result of these questions, students wrote and prepared to present their answers on video with their peers listening and participating. Prior to the video performance, Michael came in several times after school to work on his mask. The quality of his piece was therefore very high, and he even made a costume. I believe he was more motivated to strive for this quality due to the questioning process. He and I also engaged in the critique process after school, resulting in more change I observed, but was not revealed in his answers. Katy changed her original idea completely. The bright colors she talks about in answering question 1b. changed as time went on and she came in at recess to work with one of her friends (Tania) who had a unique concept for her mask. Katy changed the form to a bent oval, and cut three large oval negative spaces. She also changed the color scheme, and the emotion to a pastel-silver-blue to portray a "sullen, flowing look" She further developed her idea by including it in a charcoal drawing in art class. Katy discussed it during class critique and explained it as a"dusty" symbol of destruction. She said the man in her drawing was trying to escape from the clouds and the wind force (drawn with lines) because it threatened to destroy his life. So, her image changed totally over time, and she also added a flowing costume, and became very proud and confident of her movement.

In the video, the students use several art elements and principles to describe their artwork. This helped them to feel more professional about their work. Following the video, their attitude seemed more serious and focused. Katy writes about her process: “I had many steps to my construction : I drew a sketch of what I wanted. Then, I began construction, then I went through a concentrated trial and error stage. Then, I added on tissue paper. The group work, and cooperation helped the problem solving to improve and be more meaningful to the student. Michael says “ I drew the Maori forms, and at first copied them in black on my mask surface, and then I experimented with the shape and expanded it, reduced it, stretched it out and then made curved designs out from my own mind to decorate the outer part of the main bird man cylinder. I started with a Maori form, but changed it to become my own symbol. The huge circle within a circle eyes are my idea as are the black beak. Carrie fielded questions from a peer group both from the art drawing class and the mask-performance group. As a result, she added a pattern of ferns under her troll figure which strengthened the drawing, and added a coiled movement to her mask, making it more interesting as a movement piece.

The students strengthened their opinions due to observation and questioning.

They began to engage in excellent inquiry. Following the formal written and video questioning and discussion, they brainstormed with each other during movement rehearsals. They practiced their movements, and listened to peer assessment about how to improve the effectiveness of the movement and whether it fit their character. A student with dance background gained confidence in voicing her opinion on how the dances could improve. Students who were especially reticent were encouraged and supported by the group. They even followed suggestions by a first grade observer and welcomed the band teacher’s suggestion to use a bongo player for background beat and a light technician to improve the lighting of the performance. So, the performance was of high quality due in large part to the critique process.

Unfortunately the last question could not be answered due to lack of time. Assessment of the video would have resulted in further deepening the students’ understanding and maturity as artists.

Conclusion

Starting with a specific Maori image through sketches to a three-dimensional head mask, I have shown that students can effectively and creatively alter the image of one culture to become reflective of the art-maker's culture and personal expression. It then becomes unique for the artist. The intent of the mask, in this instance, is further enhanced through the folk story, and the movement chosen and developed to further serve the intent of the mask, and turn it into a ritual act, or a performance. The strength of the pieces improved after the students answered questions which provoked reflective thought, and the oral critiques and brainstorming evident in the critique and discussion video.

This project helped me assess my own questioning and interviewing techniques. With more time, I would have students do more interviewing among themselves.

Nancy Stone
Williston Central School
Williston VT

Setting

Close to 1,000 students attend Williston Central School in grades K-8. Grouped in multi-aged "families of learners," students and professionals are organized by Lower Houses (K-4) and Upper Houses (5-8). The curriculum emphasizes searching and discovery of knowledge; using technology to enhance, expand, and monitor learning; and making personalized education plans to reflect skills important to essential learning behaviors as outlined in Vermont's Common Core.

The Williston Central School Board recently received an award for its support of the arts. Each "house" of four classrooms has an additional room allocated for creative activities. The hallways have display boards; the main lobby has two lit display cases. The auditorium has a professional quality stage and control booth; each spring many students are involved in a musical drama production. The Related Arts staff is increased as student numbers warrant: there are currently two art positions, two and one-half music, and one band. The two fully equipped art rooms each has plentiful storage, numerous sinks, and a comprehensive budget.

Lower House students, within two-grade groupings, attend 40-minute Related Arts classes (music, art, library, physical education) on a weekly basis during the school year. Upper House students attend Related Arts, with the addition of Technical Arts and Living Arts, four days a week for six-week rotations. In addition, each Related Arts teacher becomes a team member of a house for one full day a week in nine-week rotations so that integration of the arts is a planned enrichment. The art teachers also offer Art Resource Time for small groups to do special projects.

The art program focuses on the following essential outcomes: Art Production (creative thinking skills); Art History, Art Criticism, and Art Philosophy (critical thinking skills); and Reflection and Self-Assessment (communication skills). Projects often combine independent creativity with group collaboration.

Guiding Question

This Curriculum Action Research Project looks at student problem-solving and reflection techniques used in two Williston Central School combined third- and fourth-grade art classes. Using Vermont's recently established Common Core Framework for

Curriculum and Assessment, it addresses two of the Vital Results listed under the Content Standards for Reasoning and Problem Solving:

- The student can think abstractly and creatively.

- The student chooses and uses effective means of solving problems. The student can apply logical strategies to solve problems.

Since national and local education standards are also currently being set, the following connections will be studied:

- Linkage to the National Standards for Art Education, specifically Content Standard #5: "Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their own work and the work of others" and Content Standard #6: "Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines."

- Linkage to Williston Central School's assessment design for the same Vital Results under Reasoning and Problem Solving.

<u>The Art Project for Action Research</u>

Two classes of third- and fourth-grade students will create and decorate plaster gauze masks which requires creative problem-solving in several ways:

A. In the construction of a sturdy mask with additives joined securely.

B. By integrating disciplines, the mask will exhibit:
   1. An intrapersonal-personal reflection of the child's hidden self which relates to some field of knowledge learned in school (e.g. music, history). This relates to National Art Standard #5. It will include personal choices in facial expression (review of cartooning),color, and symbols or metaphors.
   2. An expressive style that relates to art history (e.g. pointillism, cubism, expressionism).

Group and individual activities include viewing audio-visual resources, playing art criticism games, and doing hands-on art production. Many of these activities are videotaped. Assessment will not necessarily include rubrics for individual student rating. Rather, it will set quality standards to be addressed in critiques and student reflective writing.

Approach

A. Activity: Introduction and Demonstration (1 class)

The class sees a slide of a skull . . . a hidden self that each of us has. The world sees our face but the mask reveals another hidden self . . . out special interests, a metaphor of who we really are. Slides are shown of previous masking classes in which students layered plaster gauze on each other's faces. A student volunteer is masked by the teacher with each step explained and every question answered to allay any fears.

Students are taught the techniques for strengthening the mask by overlapping gauze, turning up corners, and giving the nose and outside edge extra layers. Responsibility and trust are emphasized when the "patient" cannot see while being masked. The procedures for laying on the gauze, waiting for it to harden, and clean-up are given.

Assessment Strategy: Students write reflections in the journal on their expectations of what the masking process will be like.

B. Activity: Masking (2 classes)

Alternating roles as the "patient" one week and as the "doctor" the other week, each student participates in molding plaster gauze masks on a partner's face.

Preliminary discussion includes review of techniques for strong mask-building and for the need to communicate and build trust between partners. Soft music is played. The "doctor" builds a mask, waits for it to dry, and upon removal introduces the "patient" to his 3-D self. The masking process is videotaped.

Assessment Strategy: Students try on their masks and, while the same soft music plays, they write reflective journal entries about the masking experience, revisiting their original entry predicting what it would feel like. Some students may share their reflections with the class.

C. Activities: Designing the Mask (3 classes)

Students plan the theme by filling out worksheets which help them focus on a theme relating to a personal interest that has arisen from another educational discipline. This activity addresses Vermont's Content Standard for Reasoning and Problem Solving and the National Art Content Standard #6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines. This worksheet will remain with the student's journal.

Each student is given an art reproduction by one of the following artists:

Van Gogh	Expressionism with small brush strokes
Seurat	Pointillism with small dots for mixing color
Picasso	Cubism with geometric shapes and many views
Miro	Fantasy with geometric shapes and linear elements

Students then play the game of Token Response. They are given tokens to place in front of each artist's work. When all the choices have been made and discrepancies in taste are evident, students articulate the reasons for their selections of art that they most like, dislike, and think took the most time. They then select one of the four styles as most appropriate for the painting style on their mask. This relates to the same content standards as above.

Criteria:

1. In categorizing the work of the four artists, the class can describe characteristics of the particular styles.
2. In discussing their Token Response choices, students can use art vocabulary relating to color, color-mixing techniques, contrast, pattern/repetition, abstraction, realism, fantasy, cubism, etc. They can name the artists.
3. The art elements and principles that were emphasized are then used by the class as it develops a list for the quality standards of their mask designs.

Assessment Strategy:

1. The activities and discussions will be videotaped.
2. The worksheets will be placed in the journals, used as references while painting the masks, and revisited when the final assessment and reflective writing is done. The worksheet also requests a variety and final selection of some facial expression/emotion for the mask which is a review of this year's cartooning curriculum.
3. The student enters reasons for the choices of theme, style, and expression in the journal. These will be revisited in the final assessment.

D. Activity: Quality Standards for Mask Design

The teacher guides the class to set the following standards which are then posted in the room for reference. Keeping the standards in mind, students then make colored sketches of the mask. The

sketches are displayed as a group and critiqued by the class to give positive feedback before the actual painting begins on the mask.

Criteria—Setting Quality Standards:

1. Symbols, pattern, line, and color effectively convey the theme of the inner self based on an interest from another academic discipline.
2. The painting technique and design make apparent the selected art history style.
3. The mask has an expressive emotion through the use of eyebrows, eyes, and mouth. These are emphasized through effective contrast of color.
4. The shape of the mask is changed from the original shape by additives (cardboard, feathers, fringe, yarn, etc.).
5. The mask shows thoughtful problem-solving in its sturdiness and its integration of theme and style.

Assessment Strategy: Videotaping of standard-setting process and of the group critique. A group critique of the sketches addresses the Common Core Vital Result for knowing how to critique the validity and significance of interpretation. It also addresses the National Art Standard for reflection and assessment of the characteristics and merits of their own work and the work of others.

E. Activity: Painting and Completing the Mask (3-4 classes)

Students use paint and additives to create a personal statement about themselves.

Criteria: The posted quality standards set by the class.

Assessment Strategies:

1. A class critique is videotaped before the masks are totally complete (so that adjustments may be made) and another is held near mask completion.
2. Students who finish early are videotaped reflecting upon how they met the quality standards as problem-solving in their mask. Some students will be videotaped on the playground to see how body movement and interaction enhances the effect of the masks.
3. Students revisit their original thoughts and sketches in their journals. They make written reflections on changes, reasons, successes, difficulties, and problem-solving strategies, relating them to the quality standards.
4. The journal becomes part of the student's portfolio which is sent home at the end of the year.

5. The art teacher looks over each student's journal and mask. A narrative comment is written for the report to parents relating to the Vital Results of Vermont's Common Core:

a. Choosing and using effective means of problem-solv ing
- Logical strategies were used to solve problems
- Appropriate methods, tools, and strategies were applied to meet the criteria
- Patterns and connections were identified

b. Thinking abstractly and creatively
- Originality is demonstrated by developing ideas unique to that student
- Ideas and connections are demonstrated in the physical model of the mask
- Elaboration is demonstrated by specified details in the plans, as well as in the final mask
- Flexibility is demonstrated by use of divergent solutions
- Aesthetic judgments were made based on explicit criteria
- Interdisciplinary perspective is evident

Analysis/Synthesis

A. Activities and Worksheets

The activities having to do with discussing art styles and being articulate about likes and dislikes went very well. I was surprised at some students' insights and application of art terms and believe the experience to be valid. However, few students addressed the choice of art style. Perhaps this part of the problem-solving criteria was too abstract for this age level. The children use a paintbrush to express an idea but do not yet recognize that brush strokes and color theories offer different styles of expression. However, several students readily grasped the cubist concept of multiple views when they painted their masks with a vertical division to express more than one personality trait.

The worksheets designed to help the students develop a theme that integrated another school subject had problems. It appeared that my questions may have been too advanced for the third/fourth-grade classes. For instance, they seemed to have difficulty remembering any research they had done and did not have much experience in thinking about careers. Although some really seemed to understand the concept of a metaphor and designs as

symbols, other students seemed to pick an animal theme simply because they liked the animal. The fourth-graders seemed to understand how the brainstorming questions on the sheet led them to choose a theme.

After the students' first day of planning worksheets, I sat down to read the entries from two classes, to look at the sketches, and to decide which students were most articulate so I would select them for the action research. To my dismay, only one student had completed the assignment!

Still believing that my questions helped lead the children to make personal choices, I redesigned the worksheet, tightening up the focus questions and writing them in bold size to make the experience more friendly. I also felt secure that offering a choice between four art styles, though more complicated than dictating one style, gave students problem-solving experience to make the masks more introspective. It also suits my teaching style of giving a learning structure which has personal choices built in.

Once the restraining activity of using words and pictures to plan the mask was completed, the students began the long-awaited painting and decorating. What a pleasure it was to have them ask for their portfolios so they could use their plans and drawings. When they asked if they were allowed to make changes, I replied, "Of course. Just remember why you did it so you can explain your problem-solving later." It was so refreshing to see by believe in their abilities to meet challenges come true.

B. Quality Standards

Having the students set explicit criteria for aesthetic judgments and integrated themes was valuable. Posting the list was essential during class critiques and peer conferencing. In the past, I would verbally list things to think about, but never posted the criteria and never had young children revisit the list for self-assessment. It helps and it works!

One interesting change in the research occurred. When a few students finished early and others still needed assistance, I decided to have peer conferencing rather than teacher conferencing. The video camera was aimed at two students standing near the posted criteria. As they interviewed each other, they restated the goals for all to hear and were empowered in a way that was familiar to them from classroom conferencing in math and writing.

C. Linking Disciplines

The integration of academic studies into the mask-making project would be more successful if the art teacher and classroom teacher coordinated the masking activity with the timing of a unit studying some culture or animal group. I inquired about this happening for this action research project, but the theme of the classroom unit currently studied was something like "How machines work" and did not seem appropriate.

Because the students came for weekly 40-minute periods, each class period required review of the project. I wrote in my journal at the time, "I'm tired of repeating the criteria. There is a real problem with short classes only once a week; younger aged children especially have trouble retaining the assignment." Because I have experience with integrating art with classroom studies through our school's once-a-week, full-day block scheduling, I know it can be very successful. This project just didn't fit the schedule of integrating classes.

I also may have set up the project to use too advanced intrapersonal skills for the majority of the children. If there had been more time to plan with the teachers for inner-self activities, the students would have had better understanding of that aspect.

D. Linkage to Local, State, and National Standards

The project followed expectations in addressing the National Standards for Reflection and Making Connections, recognizing the limits as mentioned in the previous section. The journal entries, art game discussions, group critiques, and peer conferencing were all opportunities for "reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others."

Halfway through the project, I had some misgivings about ability readiness and it was suggested that I change my research to address a more appropriate Vermont State Content Standard, that of Personal Development with the Vital Result of Developing a Sense of Unique Worth and Personal Competence. After deliberation, I came to recognize that I didn't need to research whether art develops self-worth: I've years of experience seeing it happen. I decided that Reasoning and Problem Solving were truly my choices for action research; I know it happens in art but I needed to document it. Although these mental skills are often seen as only applicable to academic studies, the Vermont Common Core sets standards for them even for lower grades and recognizes that the arts help develop abstract and creative thinking as well as problem-solving skills.

E. Abstract Thinking

Part of the dilemma of this project came from needing documentation that children used creative and abstract thinking. Even though I heard "Oh, no. Writing again!", the concrete masks were influenced by the abstract thinking that occurred in the worksheets, sketches, and critiques. The many classes spent on using words and designing in the abstract were essential to the study but kept the children from messing in the paint and feathers and glue! They love the concrete act of art production. Art teachers also love it and, indeed, most of their training is in this area. Today, however, it is recognized to be only a part of art education. Teachers and students must explore art criticism, art history, art philosophy, reflection, and self-assessment. Thus language skills, both written and spoken, are becoming part of the art curriculum. Reasoning and problem-solving are natural complements to those vital results. Using those skills and multiple intelligences, the children are likely to have more depth of expression in their concrete art production.

Epilogue

The student journals, videotape of group critiques, and peer conferencing indicate that varied and rich opportunities for synthesis, risk-taking, and commitment to action were present. For some students in the lower grades, written reflections and abstract thoughts can challenge creative thinking to reach greater heights. Others find it a struggle to be verbally articulate or even to apply basic writing and reading skills. Nevertheless, this three-month project shows that written journals have definite benefits for an expanded project, giving children an experience that can be built upon in upper grades.

When asked to reflect on their problems and how they solved them, the majority of the students reported that they "had no problems." This was disturbing, since building problem-solving skills was the focus of this action research. I slowly recognized, however, that the children felt so confident from their pre-planning that they knew what to do and acted confidently. They did not realize that they were problem-solving when they dealt with the quality standards.

The long list of quality standards sometimes seemed too complex and unsuccessful for the age group. However, in reviewing the photos and the journals, it was seen that different students met the criteria in different ways. Instead of confusing the chil-

dren, the multiple offerings may have actually helped them choose responses that related to their own personal gifts or intelligences. I wanted them to use all the criteria. They selected aspects that were meaningful in expressing their hidden self!

Christine Simpson Andrews
Wilmington Middle/High School
Wilmington VT

Setting

This project was undertaken in the course of a visual arts class at Wilmington High School, a small, rural middle and high school with approximately 250 students in grades 6-12. The arts have been gaining importance over the years at Wilmington High School. There is a full-time visual art program (for which I am the sole teacher), part-time instrumental music, and part-time vocal music. Close to half of the high school students and all of the middle schools students take visual arts class every year. The school has an active drama group that puts on several productions a year. This year there was a dance program partially sponsored by the Vermont Council on the Arts.

There are nine art electives offered each year to high school students, three each semester. Electives during the 1994-95 school year included art history, drawing, bookmaking, painting, set design, pottery, jewelry, thematic art, and animation. Art classes focus on the creative process and bringing out each person's unique vision. Techniques are also emphasized, as it is necessary to have the skills to express the ideas. Classes are 90 minutes in length and meet every other day. The long classes allow the students ample work time.

This project mainly involved the thematic art class; however, the format of the self-evaluation form was changed for all students. This class was chosen because it was a small group of eight students, and I felt it would be easier to begin changing the critique format with a small group. The students who participated were in grades 9-12.

The art room is a large space on the third floor of the school. It has windows facing west, south, and north, affording wonderful views of the town and the hills in the distance. There is a pottery area separate from the main working area.

Guiding Question

I was interested in changing the way in which the students and I evaluated their visual arts projects. We had been using a project evaluation form that the students would fill out, and then I added comments. I was disappointed with the lack of depth in the students' written comments about their work. I wanted to be able to elicit more insight into the process and results of their creative ability. Understanding one's own process and being able to evalu-

ate a project without judgmental prejudices are keys to developing the techniques necessary to master any art or craft.

Approach

The first thing I did was redesign the evaluation form by regrouping the series of reflective questions at the top, after the project description section. The students were asked to select one of the questions and write a page about their work, instead of writing a sentence or two in response to each question.

Another innovation of this project was to have critiques for each of the student's pieces. I selected the thematic art class to work with in the critique process. this class worked on projects in a variety of media based on a theme chosen by the class.

The first theme chosen was "windows." The theme was open to interpretation, meaning perhaps a framework for a view into another area, or a "window of opportunity." Students illustrated the theme using watercolor, collage, stained glass, colored pencil, or paint. The other themes the group explored were "reality," "something that is important to me," and "moods."

The critiques were held as each student completed his or her piece. The students were asked to comment on what they saw in the work. Students were coached to keep the comments positive during the critiques. If they did not like something, they were asked to be constructive in the criticism by recommending an alternative to the choice the artist made.

I transcribed the comments, printed them out, and gave a copy to the artist, who would then complete an evaluation sheet. During the initial critiques I had asked the students to comment on what they were seeing, but I felt that their comments needed to be more in-depth and focused. I began to ask things like "How is color used here? and would frame the questions around the elements and principles of art in order to elicit remarks about certain aspects of the piece. As the class progressed, students began to make more useful observations instead of simplistic statements like "It is red."

Analysis/Synthesis

In looking at the students' evaluations of their work, I believe that this structured evaluation improved the freedom and depth of their responses. While the critique sessions seemed to give them more insights into their process, I am still not satisfied with

the range of comments or with their ability to be constructively critical of their own work. Nevertheless, great improvement was shown.

During the first few critiques the students were hesitant to engage in the process, and the artist was silent. But as ground rules were set and the first few critiques were done, students began to feel safer with the process and more of a dialogue developed between viewer and artist. They not only grew more comfortable with the process, but actually began to enjoy it. I was pleased to note that they began to remind me that they had a piece ready for critique. The reward of audience response, especially for a beginning artist, is integral to maintaining enthusiasm, and predictably they grew to enjoy the other students looking at and commenting on their work.

Ideally they will learn to *internalize* this process of positive outlook and constructive criticism on how they might improve their work next time. This notion of "next time" is crucial, because in order to work toward mastery of any skill—from visual arts to science to writing, or any worthwhile endeavor—the student has to be able to retain enthusiasm during the awkward beginning attempts.

The transcripts of the student critiques seemed to be very beneficial to the recipient, and in general this was probably the most successful aspect of the program. Many students, particularly those who are less verbally articulate, were pleasantly surprised to find their work had been "understood."

Also, the direction I gave them prior to critiquing others' work—not just to say they didn't like it, but to offer an alternative which they felt might improve the work next time—resulted in a bit more introspection, and an ambiance of helpful ideas rather than simple "opinions."

I found that the critique process seemed to affect the students' work while it was in progress. They became aware of the audience their piece would have and began to be somewhat more deliberate when working on a piece. Students began to discuss their work-in-progress with others in smaller table groups and would ask for feedback about the choices they were making.

The act of grading their own work is one area of the evaluation that simply is not working yet—it seems to distract them from a true analysis of their creative process. At the end of the questionnaire, students are asked the question, "What grade would you

give yourself on this project?". Students in this class consistently graded themselves with an A or A+, hoping that this would sway the teacher. Then, to give any kind of real grade regarding effort, concentration, concept, and technique relegates the teacher to the role of judge. Further changes are necessary in order for students to get around the game-playing aspect of grading and get to another level of insight about their work.

One possibility is to eliminate this section entirely. Another idea I had for next year's follow-up is to leave the question as it stands. Then, perhaps on a different section of the questionnaire, ask "If your grade were not important to you, and you really only wanted to rank your work against your best effort (best being an A), what grade would you give yourself?"

Another possibility is to develop, perhaps on a kind of grid, a number rating system from 1-5, with 5 being best. The parameters might be expression of theme, use of materials, technique, inventiveness, and concentration while working, and may change for each project.

These ideas will be interesting to work with next year.

Epilogue

I became more comfortable with the critique process through this project. This comfort began with my participation in the critiques as part of the sessions with Sally, and continued to grow through the critique process with my students. I also felt a desire to share my work more.

I found that as an art teacher and mother, I am not alone in the need for more time to do my art work. I guess I do not feel quite so much guilt around the issue that in order to teach art, I should also be a working artist, with a body of work to show.

I also feel more comfortable running critiques of student work in the classroom. There is sometimes a deadening silence, but when students are pressed to look and observe and comment they enter the process.

In order to improve it is necessary to look at our work critically and appreciate its strengths and weaknesses. This project has helped me and my students along this path.

Kate Pond
Artist in Education
Burlington VT

Introduction

This research project tracks the development of the Talking Circle, one aspect of an overall project to design and build banners for a school cafeteria. The banner project involved a core group of eleven third-graders and five fifth-grade mentors who collaborated on designing fabric images about the solar system for installation in the school cafeteria. We used a group journal and the Talking Circle as tools for design.

Setting

Over the last few years my work has evolved from creating "precious" sculptures placed in galleries to site-specific sculptures designed for particular places and purposes. Site-specific design has led naturally into collaborative projects with students and adults to create public sculptures. Grassy Knoll is one of those places.

The school is very welcoming to artists. The music and art teachers work closely together, and teachers are receptive to schedule changes and were open to my request for a three-day design time with the core group. At the same time that I was working with the core group, the art teacher was working with the other students in related projects. Together our efforts gave a sense of cohesion to the overall theme of "weather." The school climate of cooperation and an emphasis on the value of the arts facilitated the introduction of the Talking Circle.

I started the Talking Circle at a residency I did with a Native American storyteller. We were creating a sacred circle out of boulders. On the first day he sat us in a circle and told us stories, at first explaining the whole concept of the Talking Circle. He encouraged us to pass a stick around and talk, one at a time, as each of us held the stick. I continued using this concept during that residency and found it effective while working with the design core group. Since then I have used the Talking Circle many times, intuiting its effectiveness. With this project, I have taken the time to document the student conversations that resulted from the Talking Circle.

Guiding Question

I was curious why I found the Talking Circle to be a good tool. Specifically, I wanted to analyze the types of questions and comments the students were making. My focus became "What types of questions and comments arise during a Talking Circle?"

Approach

Preplanning the residency was initially with art and music teachers. A month before the residency began, I met with the classroom teachers involved to find out what their needs and questions were. Then, a core group consisting of students from participating classes designed and created the public sculpture for the school. The classroom representatives went back to their classes, reported on the design progress, and took ideas from their classmates back to discuss with the core group. During the course of the residency, other students from the school volunteered to help build the sculpture.

Along with a Talking Circle, core group members kept journals based on design ideas and sketches. This combination of talking and sketching provided the basis for planning. A tape recorder was placed in the middle of the Talking Circle to record conversations. Eventually a student suggested that we replace the stick with a microphone so that their voices would be audible.

A. Talking Circle as a Decision-Making Tool

The intended purpose of the circle was to help make group decisions. Together with the journal, the circle served this function well.

B. Talking Circle: Evolving Stages of Creating

First Circle: decided basic structure of the solar system. From student-generated ideas, decided that planets in banner form would be arranged in correct order, and that planets would be shown in comparative scale.

Second Circle: discussed how to identify each planet, with symbols from Greek mythology, and by showing physical nature, 3D, texture, and color.

Third Circle: students reacted to working in actual material, making scale models of banners. Students become aware of changing, evolving ideas in class journal.

Fourth Circle: clear use of the museum visit to create symbols for planets. Josh chose a flaming pearl to represent storms on Jupiter (Chinese robe influence); Erin became clear on symbols for Neptune, Earth, and Jupiter and asked for help with Pluto and Uranus.

Fifth Circle: student reactions to working on full-scale banners and sun. Decision to let others join work on project, but not to join Talking Circle group.

Sixth Circle: with student-designed questions, a discussion about what the banner installation really is. Discussion generated knowledge of planets apart from banner installation.

Analysis/Synthesis

The transcripts provide a clear story of the students' sharing information about the solar system and the evolution of design ideas for creating a fabric solar system in the school cafeteria. In looking through the transcripts I was able to see a cycle of development in the Talking Circle that had only been intuitive before. In the first circle I was able to share what the project was about. It was an acquainting of all the participants with the project and each other. The generation of creative ideas came in the second and third circles. The fourth and fifth circles were more for practical problem-solving, and the final circle was a discussion about the process. Having seen the way that this worked out, I will be more aware of the structure for future planning. Before reviewing the transcripts, I didn't know when the creative ideas would flow. Now I see that this doesn't happen immediately and will not expect it to in the future.

Many other points came out of the Talking Circle as well:

• Circle is a good way for me to pass on information about a project in a nonlecturing manner, since the nature of the circle is that each person has a turn to talk. It's almost impossible for me to dominate.

• Circle takes its own direction because a teacher can guide it only when it's her turn to talk.

• Student-posed questions in the last circle made for varied response.

• Art teacher and teaching artist talked too long.

• Ideas evolve in circle much like designs evolve in the class journal.

• Circle gave clear evidence of students bringing their science knowledge into use.

• Circle discussions unified group.

Mixing ages seemed to work well for many purposes. The third-graders had just studied the solar system and some had more current science information than their older partners. However, the fifth-graders were able to give more concrete, practical ideas for design while the third-graders offered more fantasy. I was concerned about the younger ones being overpowered by the older ones and compensated by working with the younger ones during a one-on-one period. A question still remains, though, about how to balance participation when working with mixed ages where the developmental differences are pronounced.

On top of developmental issues is the larger issue of participation in a group discussion. Silence occurs for many reasons. Originally I noticed that by the end of my residency, all but one student took part in group conversations. Initially I attributed that change to the Talking Circle being a safe place. While this may still be true, closer examination of the evolving stages of the circle makes me wonder about some other factors.

The stages of getting acquainted, generating ideas, solving technical problems, and reflecting upon a creative experience require different kinds of thinking. Speaking while getting acquainted involves trust, excitement, curiosity, and a comfort with spoken language. Generating ideas means being able to suspend judgment and feel secure enough to share ideas. Spontaneity is key, as is the ability to build from the ideas of others. Solving technical problems requires systematic thinking, knowledge about the materials, and an understanding of limitations. Reflecting upon an experience gives entry to most group members because there is a grounded event to recount.

It would be interesting to interview students about their participation to better understand the many reasons for silence in a group. In addition, closer attention should be given to which students participate at which stages of a Talking Circle.