

## **Philosophy of Literacy Integration in the Visual Arts**

### **How I see reading/writing in the Visual Arts.**

When thinking about reading in the context of the visual arts, it is more than simply reading written text. Reading text in the visual arts includes reading artist statements, as to understand why an artist created the artwork they did; Reading articles about an artists life and how that has played a role on their career and what they create; Reading about countless art making techniques; Reading various forms of literature about numerous themes artists are focusing on pertain to what has and is happening around the world and in society.

In another sense, reading in the visual arts requires reading a work visually. This includes interpreting what the artist has shown in their artwork and making predictions as to what the artist was or is trying to say. Both of these forms of reading is important in the Visual Arts.

In the writing sense for the Visual Arts there is more than writing the above for an audience to read, but there is writing included during the process of creating art. Many times artists, including myself, research topics and write about what they know before they begin creating a piece of work. This helps them fully develop their ideas.

I believe reading and writing in the visual arts allows for endless amounts of knowledge to be gained through multiple forms. "The purpose for reading is not just to pass a test or get through the textbook. [It is] to gather information, construct meaning, and knowledge about important issues" (Daniels & Zelmelman, 2004, p. 16). You learn about more than just what a piece of work looks like. After reading material related to the visual arts you can learn about how to interact and communicate ideas to others, what issues you or others may face daily or in the future and in turn gaining perspective, you can take a look into our past to predict or change our future, among nameless other opportunities.

### **How I see reading/writing in the Visual Arts Classroom**

Reading isn't just reading a novel and writing isn't just writing essays. I want my students to understand that reading is a valuable and irreplaceable tool to gain knowledge and insight to a topic. For the artist, writing could be anything from brainstorming information and ideas to writing your own artist statement, writing a proposal for a commissioned work to a book about a body of work and their art making process. Reading in the content of the visual arts could also be reading about a technique, learning something new about a process, reading about an artist, what art can do, and what art can be about.

First of all, I do not enjoy or see the benefits in the majority of our classrooms; however, it is even less likely to see a textbook in the Visual Arts classroom. Harvey Daniels and Steven Zelmelman discuss in their book, *Subjects Matter*, why and how important it is to create a classroom library, "what we are trying to create here is something like the living room of a big, eclectically literate family, a place where all manner of books, magazines, clippings, articles, brochures, and newspapers surround us" (Daniels & Zelmelman, 2004, p. 63). My wish is to never make my students read from one textbook. I see myself continually collecting reading material from various sources such as the ones mentioned above. I will be collecting material about themes artists have and do explore, artists themselves, artists work, art in the community, and anything

else related to the Visual Arts. This will all go toward a classroom set of reading materials for students to resource whenever they see fit. It is highly likely some of these readings will make their way into part of a lesson or project I teach since the material will be key components in better understanding the project or lesson. Within my library there will be "Multiple texts with multiple view points" allowing for students to gain a better understanding when it comes to interpreting and reading art (Daniels & Zelmelman, 2004, p. 62).

Daniels and Zelmelman explain, "reading is linked to action in the real world: young readers engage in research, documentation, correspondence, and advocacy" (p.16). I hope to foster this by incorporating reading and/or writing into the various stages of the natural art making process included in my style of teaching: learning about a big idea, researching, brainstorming ideas for personal work, developing sketches, and final evaluations/reflections. Student's assessment of their reading and knowledge gained will "[rely] less on quizzes and worksheets, and more on complex performances, products, and exhibitions" through art. This allows students to take ideas from one form of expression into another which "ensure[s] deep comprehension" and in turn allows for a personal voice to be formed in relation to bigger ideas. This allows for less of an "exclusive focus on 'right answers'" with "room for debate and discussion for differences of opinion and interpretation." (Daniels & Zelmelman, 2004, p. 16, 31-32)

### **Big Idea/Themes**

My lessons and classroom curriculum will be based on art making with meaning through the explorations of "big ideas". According to Sydney Walker, "...Big ideas are broad, important human issues. Examples of big ideas are power, identity, community, nature, and conflict; and big ideas such as these have become useful tools for linking the various subject areas in the interdisciplinary curriculum efforts of the last decade" (2001, p. xiii). This approach for art making is used by many and most professional artists' as well, "to motivate and direct their artistic expression" (Walker S., 2001, p. xiii). This will be much of the students inspiration for their work as well and "by using big ideas, students find that art making is more than creating an interesting design or learning a particular technique with a specific medium: art making also becomes an expression of important ideas related to their own life and the lives of others" (Walker S., 2001, p. xiii).

The students exploration of various big ideas related to students lives will be explored through research and inquiry based instruction through various visual and text materials, with this students will begin to "understand that reading is not just 'receiving a message,' but actively building meaning upon prior knowledge" (Daniels & Zelmelman, 2004, page 31) from their own lives to form new knowledge. In *50 Content Area Strategies for Literacy the authors have stated*, "The knowledge and experiences students bring to the classroom greatly determine their success in learning new material. Many researchers feel that a student's prior knowledge about material is the single most important variable in reading comprehension" (Fisher, Brozo, Frey, & Ivey, 2007, p. 31)

To allow for the students to gain a deeper understanding of a big idea in relation to their lives and how reading can build their knowledge base, I plan to implement several teaching strategies at this time. I will use some form of brainstorming prior knowledge and KWL's to find out how a certain big idea already plays a role in their lives and allows them to visually see how they can build on knowledge they already have (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steineke, 2007, p. 101). Concept Maps will also be used at this time to allow for students to "focus [their] attention on the key components of a [theme]... [which] also encourages students to integrate their personal knowledge into a definition" (Fisher, Brozo, Frey, & Ivey, 2007, p. 41-50).

## **The Artmaking Process**

### *Research*

In the book *Teaching Meaning Through Artmaking*, Sydney Walker (2001) explains, “one reason that artists are able to explore big ideas over long periods is the time that they invest in building a solid knowledge base. Similarly, students need an adequate knowledge for artmaking if their exploration and expression of ideas is to be substantive and complex” (p. 37). Several different reading and writing strategies, from the above, I see fitting into this stage and process includes people researches, RAFT’s, and I-Searches.

People researches allow for students to create surveys and interviews to gain knowledge by “simply asking people for information”, this is a valuable skill to possess when interacting outside of the classroom (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steineke, 2007). When students want information or to learn something new it is important they realize they have the power to get the knowledge and information they need by simply asking others who have the knowledge they wish to gain.

RAFT stands for “role, audience, format, and topic”, which allows for students to select one of each and write according to those guidelines. Daniels, Zelmelman, and Steineke (2007) explain that “when students have opportunities to make choices and connect more of their full selves with their work, they are almost always more engaged and more likely to assimilate the material they’ve studied” (p. 159).

Last but not least, I-Searches, “The, I-search paper is a personal story of research: how the writer became interested in it, what sources proved most useful, and what he found out.” (pg. 236) Which will be very beneficial for the student to experience and better understand how real artists come up with their themes/topics, brainstorm, and execute their works.

### *Brainstorming Ideas for Projects and Sketching*

In the visual arts, writing is an important tool to process and understand what ideas you want to include in your art. This is the brainstorming process. This process might be answering specific questions, answering your own questions and curiosities, or developing what you will actually make. Some strategies I plan on implementing during this stage are carousel brainstorming, written conversations, and Teacher-Student Correspondence.

With both, the carousel brainstorming and the written conversations, students can actively participate with one another in brainstorming ideas as a jumping off point to dive deeper into specific topics. Carousel Brainstorming “...works best for introducing a new topic” (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steinek, 2007, p. 81). While, written conversations can be used to strengthen project ideas between two students similar to a critique but on a one to one scale. This would be beneficial to push student’s ideas further and for others to ask them questions to simply think about prior to starting to create their final art products. (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steinek, 2007)

When students have completed sketches for a project, I plan on reviewing them and beginning what Daniels, Zelmelman, and Steinek call, “teacher-student correspondences”. These correspondences will be comments about their art and creating personal connections to the student. With this I hope to have “higher class morale, deeper understanding of the material, better-targeted instruction, and a more personal, meaningful relationship with [my] students” (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steinek, 2007, p. 106).

### *Evaluation/Reflection/Critique of work*

This is, what I believe to be, a critical component to creating art and continuing to create art. With students evaluating, reflecting, and critiquing their own work in addition to classmates works students can see how others view their work and gain more knowledge from other works they discuss. In this stage I plan on implementing nonstop writes, allowing students to turn in their RAFTs, and self evaluations or reflections, and artist statements directed towards a specific audience.

Nonstop writes will potentially be completed at the finish of an entire project and following the class critique. The nonstop writes allow for students “to trace changes in their thinking about a subject and recognize the depth of their learning” (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steniek, 2007, p. 106). This also allows me to have some type of record of their learning process from start to finish on a specific project and over an extended period of time. These will hopefully prove beneficial during the end of the semester for students to reflect on their semester and what they learned over a longer period of time.

I wish for students to also complete self evaluations related to each of their finished works upon completion, Evaluations will “include questions about how the student’s thinking changed” (Daniels, Zelmelman, & Steniek, 2007, p. 259) in relation to their art making techniques, craftsmanship, big idea exploration, among any other objectives for that specific project.

### **Problems I Anticipate for Reading and Writing in the Visual Arts Classroom**

Some problems I anticipate and what I will need to think about in order to resolve those problems are:

- Q: *Students are wondering why they are reading and writing in an art class. Why aren't we making anything?*

A: The process of art making includes research (anything from personal experience research to actually reading about topics of interest or concern). The art making process also includes brainstorming ideas. This brainstorming can be done verbally and using writing. After both of these steps have been completed it is easier to begin planning what you will actually make and how you will make it. Your ideas are developed more and are better prepared to start making a piece of work! It is also a part of many professional artists artmaking process.

- Q: *Why are we writing about something that we have already made?*

A: Reflection is another important process in art making. You can create things all day long, but until you show it to an audience you don't know if your ideas have been communicated effectively or not. Just because you understand or see something in a specific way doesn't mean that everyone else does. You, as the artist, need to be aware of the differing perspectives of others and how your work is affected by this. Reflecting also allows you to learn from what you have done. You can learn and grown from your mistakes if you recognize them. When you write about your experience you are learning in that process even if you don't even go back and read it. But within my classroom you will potentially be able to retrace your thinking process and why you did the things you did and learn from that reflection as well.

- *Issue:* Reading and writing taking up too much time and not allowing for enough time to actually create a project. This might cause for students to become bored with a project. With this I need to make sure my projects are engaging enough and differing enough between others so they can allow for students to start and finished engaged.

- *Issue*: The classroom library becoming disorganized, dwindling materials, and unused. Within the book *Subjects Matter* the authors pointed out a good way to get a handle on students “stealing” your materials, assign a student to keep track of it. As far as materials being unused, I need to make sure I am collecting resources students would be interested by keeping up with the common trends and remembering what I was interested in at that age while also focusing on my passions.

### **Final Words**

My hope, in the long run, is upon leaving my Visual Arts classroom students have a better understanding about the world they live in, by discovering “...art making [is] a meaning-making endeavor [that includes] purposeful play, risk taking, experimentation, postponement of final meaning, searching; [and] questioning” (Walker, 2001, p115). With this, I also hope students are inspired to search and gain more knowledge about their questions and curiosities of the world they live in through the invaluable skills of reading and writing.

## References

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