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The Importance of Arts in Elementary Education

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Abstract

Art is an important component of elementary education. Including art in the elementary classroom has shown to have many positive benefits including helping students develop intellectually, creating better understanding of different perspectives and cultures and improving test score. Even though there is evidence supporting the importance of art in the elementary classroom, time spent on art has been decreasing. The decrease in time has been contributed to focusing on high-stakes testing, lack of funding and a lack of teacher preparation focusing on art. This project examined the different obstacles which prohibit students from receiving art at the elementary level and focused on the use of art integrated lessons as a means of including art in the classroom. For this project, the author worked with a local fifth grade class, implemented a lesson plan and evaluated the student's engagement.

The Importance of Art in Elementary Education

In a recent class here at California State University Monterey Bay, the author's professor asked the whole class what their favorite subject was when they were in elementary school. After ruling out recess as a subject, the most mentioned subject was Art. The author also mentioned art as her favorite subject. Many were able to recall specific projects or plays that they participated in and how it still stuck with them all these years later. As a class the author recalled creating California Missions, relief maps, plays and many other pieces of art that helped the author understand the subject a little more, or learn something that the author wouldn't have just in a book.

Recently, as the author started working in different school sites as a service learner the author has had the opportunity to see the great joy and deeper understanding that creating something brings to the students. In the days of high stakes testing, art education has taken a back seat. In a conversation with one local teacher, she said that "only a handful of teachers at her site teach about different artist or styles of art" (K. Bradley, personal communication, February 21, 2016).

There are many different people involved and affected by lack of arts in elementary education. School boards, who set curriculum, principals, teachers, who implement the curriculum, students, parents and the community in which the school are in are all affected by this growing lack of arts in the classroom.

Why Arts in Elementary School Classrooms

Why art an important component in early childhood is multi-faceted. In *To Move Forward: An Affirmation of Continuing Commitment to Arts Education* (2001) the author explains that studying one or more forms of art helps a students develop intellectually. In

addition, art creates a unique access point for the student to understand multiple cultures and different importance historical contributions (To Move Forward, 2001). In addition, arts-based learning pedagogies have shown to have positive impact on multiple student academic performances (Lee, B., & Cawthon, S., 2015).

Arts education which includes visual, music, dance and drama. Parsard and Spiegelman (2012) have found that there has been a decrease in time spent on the arts except for music. Recently, there has been an increase in the amount of time spent on math and language arts instruction (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). This increase in time devoted to language arts and math has come at a cost to time spent on the arts. In the Parsard and Spiegeman (2012) study that tracked access to arts education for a ten-year period, concluded that over 1.3 million elementary students do not receive any music instruction and over 4 million receive no instruction in visual arts. Which is a decrease from the decade that the study was first conducted in.

Arts Instruction in the Era of High-Stakes Testing

Under the Bush administration The No Child Left Behind Act was put into law in 2002, requiring all states by law to introduce school accountability systems (Dee & Jacob, 2010). The accountability comes in the form of annual testing of students in mathematics and reading (Dee & Jacob, 2010). This era of test resulted in changes in the way schools focused time, spending less time on the arts. (Hanford, 2016).

Part of the reason for this decrease in time spent on the art is due to teachers having to focus on state testing (Hanford, 2016). Baker (2012) argues that students across the United States have little or no access to art because of policies to increase language arts and mathematics scores. These tests, known as high-stakes testing, which is any test that is used for accountability of the school, district, student or teachers (Hanford, 2016; Eckhoff, 2008). More

time is being spent focusing on material specific to the test themselves. With President Obama's "Race to the top" initiative, for schools to be eligible for funding, they must accept that a teacher's job is tied to their test scores (A learning point, 2010). That is to say, if a teacher is not able to raise their students test scores, then they will need to find another profession (Hanford, 2016).

Which such importance placed on the scores of standardized tests it is no wonder that teachers are spending more time on preparation. In fact, in New York State, during the 2014-2015 school year, for grades 3-6 teachers spent on average 1,100 minutes specifically dedicated to teaching to the standardized testing process. In addition to teaching for the tests, students all across the country spend weeks every year actually taking the test themselves (Hammond, 2011).

Funding is also an issue for arts education at the public school. In New York City, in the 2019-2010 school year alone, the budget for the arts education decreased by almost \$14 million or 4.3 percent (Accelerating Arts Education, 2011). This was the fourth year consecutively for a decrease in budget specific for arts in New York City elementary school (Accelerating Arts Education, 2011). This cut meant the loss of not only qualified art instructors either on a part time or a full time bases but also for supplies need to implement art programs across the city (Accelerating Arts Education, 2011).

Arts in the California Public Schools

In 2001 California adopted art standards for all public schools which include four domains of art; theater, visual art, dance and music (Status of Arts Education in California Public Schools, n.d.). Even though it is a standard for all public schools in California to teach art, this article reports that due to federal accountability requirements of math and reading (high-stakes testing), California school's arts education is "highly inconsistent" in terms of quality as well as

in frequency (Status of Arts Education in California Public Schools, n.d.). In addition to there being minimal time being spent across the board on the arts, students who are considered at risk or disadvantaged are often forced to take remedial courses instead of participating in arts based projects to help bring up test scores (Status of Arts Education in California Public Schools, n.d.).

Through research the author has found that including art into elementary curriculum is beneficial for student’s intellectual development (To Move Forward, 2001). The need for art in school is clear, there are many obstacles facing art integration in the elementary classroom, the author is focusing on three possible solutions; funding, teacher’s preparation, and art integration with a focus on Studio Habits of Mind (Hetland, L., Winner, E., Veenema, S., & Sheridan, K. 2007).

	Reasonableness	Cost	Time
Crowdfunding (Donorschoose.org)	Pro-Everyone has access to site. Con-Not everyone may be comfortable setting up page	Pro-There is no cost to set up. Con-There is no con for cost.	Pro- Takes little time to set up. Con-May not reach goal in reasonable amount of time, if at all.
Arts Integration (with Studio Habits of Mind Framework)	Pro-Universal, may be used with any grade level Con- Training, Funding, time.	Pro-There is no pro for this option. Con-Can be expensive to purchase supplies	Pro- There are no pros for this option. Con- may take more time to set up lessons.
Teacher Preparation	Pro-If teachers have training, they are more likely to include are. Con-Teachers already	Pro- There are no pros for this option. Con- Teachers may not want to pay to take additional classes	Pro- Can be done over length of time. Con-Possible increase length of time of school.

Teacher Preparation

In the 1970's with the passage of the Ryan Act, which took teacher licensing out of the Department of Education and created a new commission for teacher licenses, and created the multiple subject credential required for elementary school teachers (Stryker, W. G., 1974). The passage of this bill art and music requirements for elementary teacher's preparation were eliminated (Status of Arts Education in California Public Schools, n.d. & Stryker, W. G., 1974). There has since been a shift in teacher education, with an importance placed on "highly qualified teachers", and the adoption of common core standards including art standards, California now requires minimal training in art education for all prospective teachers (Status of Arts Education in California Public Schools, n.d.).

It has been shown that Professional development in art education has a positive impact on a teacher's use of arts integration in their classrooms, which has shown to have a positive influence on student in literacy and reading (Saraniero, P., Goldberg, M. R., & Hall, B., 2014). Teachers spending 30-80 hours in professional learning over a period of time were found to have the most positive benefit (Saraniero, P., Goldberg, M. R., & Hall, B., 2014).

Funding

Funding is also an issue when it comes to arts in elementary education (Jacobson, M. K. 2011). With high-stakes testing taking priority, funds for arts have been cut, making art an expendable part of elementary education (Jacobson, M.K., 2011). Schools and teachers are becoming responsible for funding themselves (Jacobson, M.K., 2011). The author has researched a variety of ways that local schools have funded the arts, one of which is through crowd funding websites, such as Donorschoose.org. Though websites such as Donorschoose.org, teachers are

able to create a profile and specifically ask for art supplies for projects, the public is able to donate to that specific class or teacher.

The benefits of sites such as these are remarkable, but not without issue. According to a local fifth teacher who has used Donorschoose.org, Krysta Bradley, Donorschoose.org is very easy for her to set up, but not everyone is as comfortable with it as she was (K. Bradley, personal communication, April 7, 2016). She also shared that it took time for her to get the money she was requesting to purchase the art supplies she was requesting (K. Bradley, personal communication, April 7, 2016).

Arts Integration (Studio Habits of Mind Framework)

The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts defines “art integration as an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrates understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both (Silverstein, L. B., & Layne, S. 2010).

The benefits of Arts Integration are vast and wide reaching (Crawford, L. 2004). Art integration has been shown to help students better connect and understand the content (Crawford, L. 2004). It has also been shown that test scores of students who receive arts integration curriculum are positively affected (Burnaford, G. E. 2001). In addition, arts integration has been shown beneficial when teaching different learning styles how to be creative and also has been shown to foster critical thinking (LaJevic, L., 2013).

Frameworks in art education help teachers better organize art in their classrooms. The author is focusing on the 8 Studio Habits of Mind (Hetland, L., Winner, E., Veenema, S., & Sheridan, K. 2007). The eight habits that this framework focuses on are developing craft, express, envision, understand arts community, engage and persist, reflect and stretch and explore

(Hetland, L., Winner, E., Veenema, S., & Sheridan, K. 2007). What makes this framework so beneficial is that it is universal, it can be used within any grade level or experience level (Hare, T. n.d.).

Although there are many benefits to art integration, it is not without problems. While many teachers may start off with good intentions but many teachers find it too time consuming to incorporate art into a lesson (LaJevic, L. 2013). Also, teachers may have little training or funding to fully implement art integration into their classrooms (LaJevic, L. 2013).

Conclusion

There is no one way to implement art in elementary classroom, but it is clear there are multiple benefits. Each solution has its own set of benefits and problems. Through research the author feels that combining the three solutions outlined is a great option.

Research Questions

Are Students given the opportunity to learn how to use basic art tools and art techniques in local classrooms?

Are they given the chance to develop the craft of art by way of stretching their individual artist's abilities in a safe and supported way?

After students create a piece of art, are they reflecting on what they did and the process involved in making it?

Action Project Significance

Below is a table listing and giving a brief description of Lois Hetland et al. (2007) Studio Habits of Mind

Develop Craft	Learn to use tools, materials and different art forms
Engage and Persist	Learn to take up subjects of personal interest and importance with the art world
Envision	Learn to picture mentally what cannot be directly observe, heard or written and imagine possible next steps in making a piece
Express	Learn to create works that convey an idea feeling or personal meaning
Observe	Learn to attend to visual, audible and written contexts more closely, critically examine
Reflect	Learning to think and talk with others about one's work and process of making it. learn to judge one's own work and others' work and processes in relation to standards
Stretch and Explore	Learn to reach beyond one's supposes limitation, to explore playfully without a preconceived plan and to embrace the opportunity to learn from mistakes and accidents
Understand Art World	Learning about the history and practice of the art form, interacting with other artists and the broader arts community

The author understands the importance of all 8 Studio Habits of Mind by Lois Hetland, the author is choosing to focus on three; Develop Craft, Reflect, and Stretch and Explore. These three are important to the development of an artist. In addition to the development of an artist, being able to reflect of works helps develop critical thinking skills (Miller, A. (2011)). For this project, the author developed an arts integrated lesson plan with the Studio Habits of Mind Framework.

Benefits of Action Project

The benefit of the research project is to create an art integrated lesson plan that can be used as a templet by other educators to create other lessons involving art. This project will also show the teachers view on art in the classroom.

Methods and Procedures

Context and Setting

The setting for this project is in a 5 grade classroom in an urban setting. The school's student demographics are 82.6% Hispanic, 9% White, and the remaining percentages consist of Black or African American, Asian, or Filipino. The school also has a socioeconomically Disadvantaged population of 77.8% and 37% of the students are English learners (California Department of Education, (n.d.)). The school is located on the southwest side of Salinas, in what would be described as a suburban neighborhood. The housing surrounding the area of the school consist of both single- family homes and two large apartment buildings located across the street. A unique feature of this site is that the class the researcher will be working in is in what is called a pod. The pod system is a large building where multiple class are held. Each class is only separated by bookshelves. Art inclusion in the curriculum in this school depends largely on the teacher. The class that the research is working with has had multiple art project throughout the year. The school is also planning on hosting an art show towards the end of the school year.

Research

The researcher became motivated to this topic because of personal experiences as a young student with art. More recently working in classrooms a working with students on art projects in the class and seeing the joy, excitement and the deeper understanding of the subject when art was used.

The connection the researcher has to the class and teacher she will be working with is that the researcher previously worked with them as a student learner.

Participants

The participants of the research project include the teacher of the local 5th grade class and her students. This class is being used because the author has worked with them previously as a service learner. The students in the class represent an average class in the city of Salinas.

Procedures

The author initially contacted the teacher and requested permission to work with her and her class. The author then set up a meeting with the teacher to decide what units of study the class would be working on and what would best benefit the student during the time the author would be completing the project. After lesson plan was decided on, the author created the lesson plan, then shared it with the teacher for approval. Once lesson plan was accepted by the cooperating teacher, the author went in to the class and implemented the lesson.

Risks

Although risks for this project are small there are still risks involved, all relating to time. The risks included the time taken away from the community partner teacher for the meeting to work with the author. Also, instruction time was used to complete the art lesson, which could be considered a risk because it was taking away valuable class instruction time.

Protections

To ensure the protection of the students, the researcher will not use any images or interviews of the students. Artwork or images of the artwork that the student creates may be used, but any identifying items, such as names will be covered before displaying.

Instruments and Equipment

The stakeholders intended for the study include the students and teachers. In addition to the students directly involved in this lesson plan, the stakeholders include a much boarder

group. All students and teacher can benefit from understanding the importance of art in elementary education.

Action Project Solution Description

The author identified why art is important in elementary schools and also possible solutions that would help get art into the elementary classroom.

The first solution the author identified is using crowdfunding sites, such as donorschoose.org. Using sites such as the one mentioned is a great way for teachers to ask for specific supplies for their classrooms. What makes this option noteworthy is the ease in which teachers are able to access it. In addition, there is no cost for teachers to set up the site.

Secondly, more art emphasis in teacher preparation. Research has shown that if a teacher receives professional development in art instruction they are more likely to implement it into their class (Saraniero, P., Goldberg, M. R., & Hall, B., 2014).

While all three aspects are important parts of getting more art into the elementary school classroom, the author choose to focus on was the implementation of art integration. Art integration has been shown to have many benefits for students. Test scores, students being able to connect content from multiple areas, and art integration is helpful in teach to multiple learning styles (Burnaford, G. E. 2001 & Crawford, L. 2004 & LaJevic, L., 2013).

Action Solution Project

The author created this lesson because it was unit of study that the student was currently working on and used the framework because the author was interested in how the students responded to a lesson with little to no direct or explicit instruction. This lesson connected researching and presenting knowledge (in form of the stamp). This lesson connects content areas to art.

Below is the lesson plan the author used.

Topic: Creating Postage Stamps

Focus: Fifth Grade

Common Core State Standard: W.5.7

Objective: Students will create a postage Stamp representing assigned state for their state report.

Summary: Beginning- (7 minutes) Hook- Ask students what they know about stamps and then show students images of commemorative state stamps. Then the students were asked what images they see on the stamps and why the images were important.

Middle- (15 minutes) Students are given practice stamp templates. Students are then asked what state they are studying, and what images would best represent that state.

Students are able to use computers, books or other materials to help them decide on images . Students are then asked to begin sketching out images (minimum of three) on their practice stamp template.

End- (Homework) After students have decided on images and placement of images, students are given stamp template that will be the final copy which they will turn in for credit. Students are instructed to use color (pencils, markers, crayons, etc.). Students are Asked to complete assignment as homework or when they have free time in class.

Students turn in completed stamp as part of their state report.

Framework: The art frameworks used for this assignment is from Lois Hetland et al. (2007), Studio Habits of Mind. There are eight Studio Habits in total, this lesson focuses on two. The first being to “Express”. This means that students are creating art to express an idea or personal meaning about the state represented on their stamp. The second framework is “Stretch and Explore”. This framework is focusing on learning to reach pasts one's own creative limits by sketching and exploring without having a preconceived plan (Hetland, 2007). This framework

was accomplished by not giving the students any concrete way that the stamp needed to be completed. Students were able to come up with their own 'important images' and place them however they wanted on their own stamp

Context: This project was completed in a local fifth grade classroom. The classroom is in large building, with classrooms located in it, separated by partitions. The class is made up of mostly Hispanic students. The class is made up of a fairly equal number of both male and female students. The class itself is very large with 31 students in all. This project however was done in small groups of three or four in an empty classroom located behind their class.

I DO-modeling

For the modeling portion of the lesson the author showed students different images of stamps. The author showed both commemorative state stamps and examples of state stamps created by other students.

We Do -Guided Practice

Guided Practice consisted of the author and students creating rough draft of a stamp for the state of California. The author and students decided on what images to put on the stamp and where to place.

You Do - Independent Practice

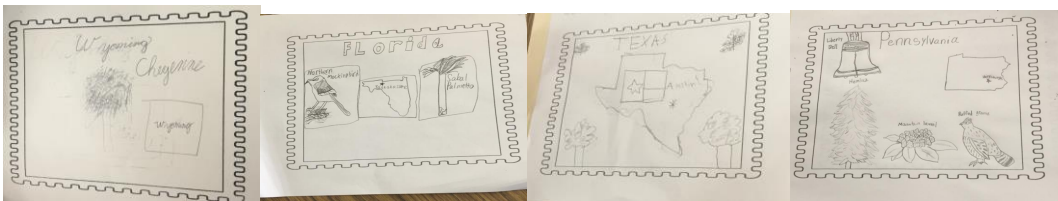
After Guided practice was complete, the author let students begin to create their own stamps. While students were working independently, the author walked around to monitor the students.

Lessons Learned-

The lessons learned from this project were significant. The author went into teach this lesson only a day or two after the students received the state for which they were going to be doing their report on. Which meant that the students had little to no prior knowledge on their

state. The stamp which they were supposed to create was to be images reflecting their state, which is hard for most students to choose when they have little prior knowledge.

The second thing that the author learned from this project is that students are much more content with direct instruction when it comes to art lessons. The framework for this project was meant to give students the opportunity to “stretch and explore” or “express” their opinion through art. While the student and the author were doing the guided practice, the students were very excited to give suggestions as to what images should be used to represent the state for the stamp that we did together, but when they were to begin individual practice they were not so sure of what images to select. Most students would look over at their neighbors stamp to see what images they were choosing. By doing so, students typically choose the same types of images for their stamps. State birds, trees, outline of state were all very common on all the students individual stamps, even though they were never told that those items had to be included. Below are examples of four students practice stamps, each one has the state tree, all have the outline of the state and only one has an image very specific to the represented state, the Liberty Bell.



The author found it be a combination of two factors for most of the students. First, the students were more familiar with the state that we did the guided practice on (California). Secondly, the students are used to direct instruction, so when the students were told to choose whatever image, they all kept asking for more specific instructions.

There are two main things that the author would change if given the opportunity to do this project again. First, the author would plan on teaching this lesson towards the end of the unit on the states/closer to when projects are doing. That way the students would be more familiar with their state and have an easier time choosing images and be able to better express their thoughts on their particular state.

The second thing that the author would do differently is make sure that all students had access to computers. When the author worked with the students on this lesson plan, the class was limited on computer access due to state testing. Because of that factor, the author was only able to work in small groups, sharing computers between the group.

APPENDIX A
SHORTENED LESSON PLAN

SHORT LESSON PLAN

Subject: Art

Topic: State Project Stamp

Grade: Fifth Grade

Learning Objective: Students will create a stamp representing the state they are doing for their state project.

Context: This project adds to the state project that fifth graders are required to complete.

Students use this art project to show important information about the state they are researching.

Time Allotment: 22 minutes for modeling and guided practice. The rest of the time needed to complete the stamps are done as homework or during free time in class.

Procedure:

I DO-modeling

Show student's examples of Stamps, discuss what is important on commemorative stamps

We Do -Guided Practice

Choose a State which no student is doing a report on, decide what images to put on state.

You Do - Independent Practice

Let students begin to create their own stamps. While students were working independently, the author walked around to monitor the students.

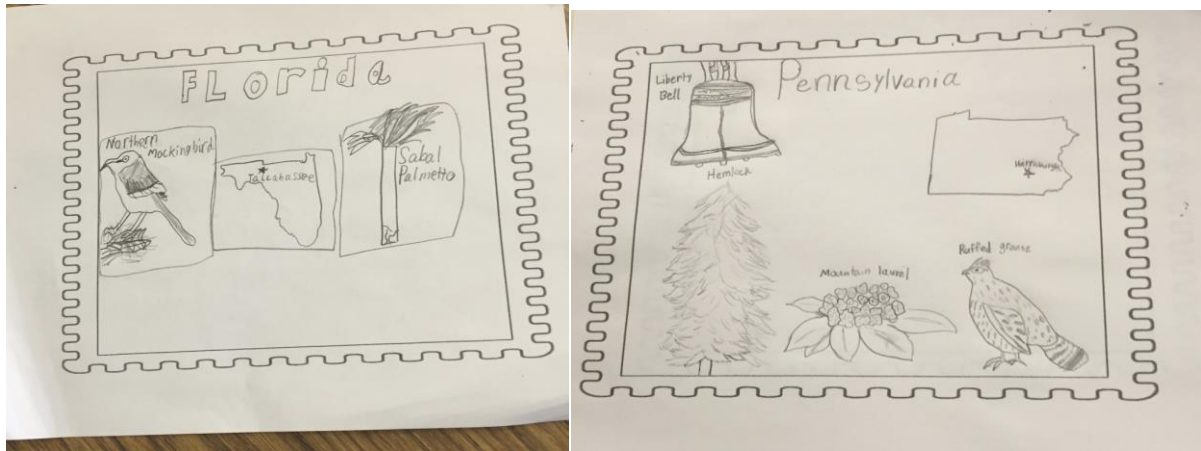
Materials - Stamp template, color pencils or crayons, access to computers (for research).

Standard-

Assessment - This lesson can be used as a part of the larger report or as a stand-alone assignment. If stand-alone assignment students will receive full credit (4 points) for completing

stamp with four images in color. 3 points credit for two to three images, in color. 2 points if two images, in color. 1 or 0 points credit if no color is used, or less than 2 images are on the stamp.

APPENDIX B
PICTURES FROM LESSON



Images of Students “practice” stamps

(Left) Fifth Grade Student (Child Artist). (2016) Florida Practice, (Stamp). Monterey County, California Capstone Presentation.

(Right) Fifth Grade Student (Child Artist). (2016). Pennsylvania Practice (Stamp). Monterey County, California: Capstone Presentation.



Images of Students Completed Stamps

(Left) Fifth Grade Student (Child Artist). (2016). Pennsylvania (Stamp). Monterey County, California: Capstone Presentation.

(Right) Fifth Grade Student (Child Artist). (2016) Florida, (Stamp). Monterey County, California Capstone Presentation.

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