

EVALUATION AS CLASSROOM-BASED CONNOISSEURSHIP IN INTERPLAY WITH A COMMUNITY OF CRITICAL INQUIRY

By Cynthia Gehrie, Ph.D.
Project Evaluator

The evaluation approach I describe here is unusual. It evolved through twenty years of work with arts integration projects at the Center for College Access and Success (formerly the Chicago Teachers' Center). Features from our current work are integrated with an evaluative and historical development of core discoveries connected to classroom instruction and the emerging role of both art and content teachers.

BACKGROUND

I have worked with *Arts at the Center's* gifted professional development and program design team of Matt Dealy and Kate Thomas for two decades. Naturally, our thinking and our methodologies migrated as we faced new professional requirements and interacted with thoughtful classroom teachers, artist teachers, teaching artists and their students in K-12 classrooms across the Chicago metropolitan area. I began as a video documenter for the Lakeview Education Arts Project (LEAP) and the Annenberg Challenge projects out of *Arts at the Center*. I was then their external evaluator for Arts Impacting Achievement (AIA) and ARTS Berwyn, both U.S. Department of Education grants.

In LEAP, I developed a collaborative system in which I video-recorded classroom lessons and interviewed teachers, teaching artists and students. By selecting clips from the raw footage, I was able to facilitate meetings with the program and professional development team to review clips and video drafts. Early on we discovered that students from primary grades through secondary school were able to clearly discuss both their process artifacts and culminating artwork. By referencing artwork physically or in photograph/video media, they could identify the materials and techniques they used, the sequence of their creative process, choices and decisions they made along the way, the ideas and knowledge embedded in the work, how they envisioned their work in an exhibit, and how their sense of themselves as artists was reflected in the work.

In our current *Studio Thinking* project, Thomas integrated this collaborative process with her prior experience using videography to videotape students as they worked in classrooms. She would interview students as they revisited their creative process while referencing their created artifacts. These video interviews were then used in our professional learning sessions to demonstrate interviewing techniques and prepare art and classroom teachers to conduct their own student interviews.

In AIA, I conducted teacher interviews in classrooms and photo-documented student-produced knowledge artifacts and artwork present in the learning environment. As we continued our evolution into ARTS Berwyn, I added classroom mapping and a complete photo profile to the environmental archive. In an initial classroom interview I would ask teachers to identify artifacts and student work that most reflected their normal teaching practice. In the *Studio Thinking* project, Dealy and Thomas continued this ethnographic research process conducting classroom

visits and interviews in the classroom context. They photo-documented the artifacts and artifacts about their normal teaching practice. From the *Studio Thinking* project, we developed a wider educational context.

HOW DO OUTSCHOOL UNCLASSROOM THE ART TE

Do they see the creative and artistic classroom student questions along

HOW DO OUT THE ARTS HOW MIGH

HOW, PHY IT POSSIB WITH OTH

HOW CAN COMMUN ROLE AND ESTABLIS THE SCHO

In previous describe, syn data. Dealy a generating, a and a rubric by Lois Hetla project, which project (see instrument w and teacher and drawing materials th discovered. as catalyst, practice into

Early in the *Studio Hab* Every Child developme asked to us assessment

visits and interviewing project art teachers in their working context. They photographed teachers teaching a lesson, documented their classroom environments, and asked about their normal teaching and reflective practice.

From the start, art and content teachers in the current *Studio Thinking* project developed a conversation about a wider educational role for art teachers.

HOW DO OTHER TEACHERS IN THE SCHOOL UNDERSTAND THE ART CLASSROOM AND THE ROLE OF THE ART TEACHER?

Do they see the art teacher as a resource for more creative and autonomous projects associated with their classroom studies? Content teachers pursued these questions alongside their art teacher colleagues.

HOW DO OTHER TEACHERS INCLUDE THE ARTS IN CLASSROOM STUDY, AND HOW MIGHT THIS BE ENHANCED?

HOW, PHYSICALLY AND PRACTICALLY, IS IT POSSIBLE TO ACTIVELY COLLABORATE WITH OTHER TEACHERS?

HOW CAN EXHIBITS IN THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CHANGE THE SENSE OF THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF ART IN ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?

In previous work I created instruments that helped me describe, synthesize and score large bodies of qualitative data. Dealy and Thomas developed and refined data-generating, active instruments such as a lesson planner and a rubric for the *Eight Studio Habits of Mind* developed by Lois Hetland and others in their *Every Art, Every Child* project, which immediately preceded this *Studio Thinking* project (see www.everyarteverychild.org). This scoring instrument was paired with a reflection form the students and teachers completed after an art session. Using writing and drawing, K-8 students wrote about what they did, the materials they used, how they responded and what they discovered. The vocabulary from the *Studio Habits* served as catalyst, helping scaffold metacognition as normal practice into the learning community.

Early in this *Studio Thinking* project we adapted the *Studio Habits* reflection form developed in the *Every Art, Every Child* project and presented it in a professional development session. Content and art teachers were asked to use these student reflections as a primary assessment tool in their collaboratively developed

lesson plans. Art and content teachers documented and studied an art project in their classrooms. By the end of year one, project teachers developed at least one classroom project, explored collaborating with other teachers in the school, integrated the *Studio Habits* into their project, asked students to write up their learning experience in a variety of ways, and prepared photo slide shows of their projects to present at a professional learning session. Yet, after so much work, the teachers found themselves in the doldrums - stalled and uncertain. Two questions informed a professional development presentation I delivered between the first and second year of this project designed to help the teachers see more deeply into the students' metacognitive process:

HOW DO WE GET BENEATH THE SURFACE TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN USING THE EIGHT STUDIO HABITS AS REFLECTIVE LENSES, AND PROMOTE DIALOGUE TO AUTHENTICALLY FEED CREATIVE PROCESS?

HOW DO WE RESPOND WHEN STUDENTS REFLECT ON THEIR ART MAKING PROCESS?

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2012

In *ARTS Berwyn*, teachers created documentation archives of each arts-integrated unit they taught, leaving us with a total of 100 gigabytes of visual data archived by 27 teachers teaching 91 arts integrated units. During this massive process of qualitative analysis, we saw that focused self-documentation provided a data reserve to authentically mirror the learning process. Teachers used these data to provoke their own reflective process and classroom dialogue with students. Teachers wrote up multiple examples of new understandings about their students discovered by reviewing documentation and student reflections, which would have otherwise been unnoticed.

In the 91 units analyzed from *ARTS Berwyn*, the strongest meta-cognition was found in classrooms where teachers worked with students to build a *rich process vocabulary*, or where teachers and artists co-created *strong visual experiences* with students that generated sensory imagery and an emotional response.

This critical discovery was used to bring teachers and students though a modeled creative and reflective process (see *Improvisation* essay on p. 10). In *ARTS Berwyn*, the first *Studio Habit* reflecting new vocabulary

was *Develop Craft*. Even very young students were able to draw the materials they used, adding labels such as “paint brushes, oil pastels, camera or pencils.” Students easily placed themselves in their drawing of making art, represented other children making art, or did both. This developed into a process, or sequence, of describing how art is made and the feelings that surface while making. Nearly all students were able to verbalize three reflective levels aligned with the art they were making. These three levels are: materials they used, what they did with the materials, and what feelings they have while making. This is exactly where students begin when using reflection in conjunction with their art making. Teachers can then respond to this beginning reflection by asking for more information or tracking reflection to be sure all three levels are addressed.

Using the three levels of action, materials, and feelings, students move on to verbalize about the next image they might make, or ask about a problem they have in making the next part of an image. *Studio Habits of Mind* begin to emerge. They *Envision* an extension of their work and begin to scaffold how they will do it. The work becomes non-linear as they envision more than one possibility. These reflections open possibilities for dialogue with the teacher and other students about the options for different directions and materials or techniques they might choose.

As we are making art, we constantly recall sensory imagery and emotional memories. They evoke in us feelings and suggest images and materials for our work. This is the basis for internal verbalization. Internal verbalization is the mental conversation we have within ourselves about our making, and the response we anticipate it might evoke in others. Internal verbalization is an essential component of metacognition.

The process of making art and the internal verbalization it provokes enhances the students’ capacity to be aware of their mental imagery and attendant feelings. It supports developing reflective language created during this process. This is an important component of critical thinking.

Internal verbalization is externalized during dialogue and conversation. Conversation is open-ended and freely associated, whereas dialogue is focused on a topic or question. In the art classroom, both are enriched when students verbally externalize their creative process by sharing with each other their internal verbalizations about making art.

The internal process is enriched when students import information they can use when making art. Much of this information derives from *Observation*. It can be from closely looking at or sketching notations

for something one will draw. Or it can be from graphic or written knowledge sources like maps, diagrams, scientific illustration, and text. The process of notation and observation is a direct link that students use to bring knowledge or mediated information into their creative process. This deep connection can be used to link the art studio to other content classrooms and aligns with essential knowledge resources used in contemporary art.

While making art, one observes his or her creative process and the alchemy of using materials on the emergent image or object, which generates another thread of internal verbalization. It feeds the emergent sense of what is possible and the critical sense of what is working or not working. Internal verbalization is a mind tool that helps the student stay with a project and re-engage when they get stuck or bored by careful repetitive actions.

The dispositions of *developing craft* and *observation* hone the artist’s capacity through internal verbalization to intentionally *Express* what they envision while making art. Gaining control of the technical process helps the artist to *Engage and Persist* over the complex steps that comprise a creative sequence of art making.

Art making is intrinsically engaging because it takes place on three levels of connection: feelings linked to mental images, materials manipulated physically or virtually, and the emergent sensory image(s). Each of these levels is doubly connected to a desire to communicate with an audience to evoke feelings, demonstrate mastery with materials, and astonish with a powerful image. At all stages of metacognition, it can be intrinsically satisfying to playfully *Explore* new materials or *Stretch* familiar materials in new directions.

We can align the metacognitive process associated with *Studio Thinking* with language from academic research in critical thinking and problem solving. Consider for a moment how selected research vocabulary presented here associates to dispositions of *Studio Thinking*: monitoring, self-correction, self-appraisal, awareness, alert consciousness, problem representation, self-discovery, self-understanding, task completion, mental imagery, strategy identification, suppositional thinking, inquiry process, introspection, awareness of feelings, meaning making, metaphor, knowledge of self in the world (Tarricone, 2011).

HOW CAN WE MAKE VISIBLE THAT THESE COMPONENTS, SO ELUSIVE AND VALUED BY THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH COMMUNITY, ARE DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN ART MAKING?

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2013

The artist teacher researcher as connoisseur, critic and curator

After two years intensively working together as a learning community investigating Studio Thinking, artistic and critical thinking, and the role of the arts in public education, project teachers came together for another summer professional development series. Together, we spent two days mapping the program, and envisioning and strategizing about classroom based research where:

Documentation and evaluation of art making and artist growth are conducted by artist-teacher researchers;

Data are students' art and documentation of their reflective writing, conversation and dialogue;

Researchers are connoisseurs and critics, working in an alternative system parallel to academic research;

Data analysis is approached through critique and curation; and

Publication is exhibition.

HOW DO WE CONVEY THE VALUE OF CLASSROOM BASED RESEARCH IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT FOCUSED ON ACHIEVEMENT TESTING AND ACADEMIC, QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH MODELS?

This question led us to look at the two systems of research as a Venn diagram where there are areas of overlap. By finding these areas of overlap, we identified elements within the proposed research that have value in the dominant system. An important area of overlap is in the discovery of teaching approaches associated with student achievement.

In 23 meta-analyses of "implementation that emphasize feedback" in 1,287 studies, "feedback" was "among the most important influences on student achievement." (Hattie, 2009, pp. 171-178). A surprising discovery in Hattie's own study of feedback was that the feedback teachers "provide to students" is less powerful than "when it is from the student to the teacher." Other meta-analyses of important teaching approaches to student achievement are metacognitive strategies and metacognitive study skills. Study skills most influential on student achievement are "organizing and transforming" (such as preliminary sketches), "self consequences" (such as working toward a public exhibition), "self instruction" (verbalizing internally or externally the steps to take while envisioning how to move to the next stage of a sequence), "self evaluation" (close observation of technique and constructive alterations), and "help seeking" (such as peer dialogue, teacher consultation or classroom critique.) (Hattie, 2009, pp. 188-192).

A reflective teaching and learning practice is rich in internal verbalization, student feedback, classroom dialogue, and teacher feedback. They are used to perceive how students develop artistic capacity, as well as identify gaps that interfere with continued growth. As connoisseur, teachers use their ability to discern where the students are, and search this learning

"This is the essence of critique— a mutual process of inquiry focused on student feedback and teacher response."

profile by mentally scanning a career's worth of art making, study and teaching. The teachers match the student's profile to an appropriate demonstration of craft, recommendation of resource, dialogue about technique, story or direct bit of information that they share. Students use this response to fill in gaps and develop skill. Each encounter deepens and diversifies the context and experience of the teacher. This is the essence of critique – a mutual process of inquiry focused on student feedback and teacher response.

Elliot Eisner (1991) wrote extensively about the researcher as both connoisseur and critic. He understood that the connoisseur has skill and experience of such subtlety that it is unseen and unknown to outside observers. This leads to conversations about the mutual support where connoisseurs thrive and about the public role of the critic. Eisner (1991) tells us,

"The task of the critic is to perform a mysterious feat well: to transform the qualities of a painting, play, novel, poem, classroom or school, or act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities of that experienced" (p. 86).

The artist teacher researcher is a connoisseur, critic, and curator. Exhibition is the public form.

REFERENCES

- Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tarricone, P. (2011). *The taxonomy of metacognition*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Winner, E., Veenema, S., Sheridan, K., & Hetland, L., (2007). *Studio thinking: The real benefits of visual arts education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.