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Reinvented Lesson Plan

Jessica Hamlin: Current Issues in Art Education

I chose to alter my EdTPA lesson sequence that I taught last Spring in a 4th grade art class. This class had 25 students who attended 40 minute class periods. This lesson sequence was originally divided into 3 lessons, each a day long. This sequence now stretches to 4 days, 1 lesson each day, with the exception of a critique on a further date. I chose to revisit this lesson because although it was highly structured based on state standards and EdTPA requirements, it only focused on pop art and Andy Warhol. In its original form, this lesson sequence did not allow for flexibility, experimentation, or questioning. It showcased portraits in a limited view, and did not question the implementation of line, or color. In this revised lesson sequence, I reevaluated the ideas of contour line, color, and portraiture to expand upon these ideas. These lessons now implement knowledge construction through inquiry-based learning and critical thinking. It reaches beyond the classroom walls by questioning cultural climate, as well as how our own personality and individuality can enhance the world around us.

The first lesson explores contour line, and involves inquiry-based learning. When the students enter the classroom, they will gather around a large table with large paper covering it. The students will be asked to draw various line types, and to describe what these lines look like and may represent. Students will draw lines that they see outside the classroom, which will lead to a discussion of symbols and language across cultures. We will explore how lines can be used for a myriad of representations. Students will be prompted to draw their own portrait in a short amount of time. We will discuss this idea of portraiture and emotion through expressive lines

(see Day 1 procedure in lesson 1-2). In this line exercise, we are using artmaking as investigation rather than exercise. This is an idea found in Olivia Gude's article, "Postmodern Principles: In Search for a 21st Century Art Education" (Gude, 2004a, pp. 8). She uses this principle, art as investigation, in her Spiral Workshop, to promote knowledge construction through experimentation by the students. As the students research line, they are sharing conversations on how line can be interpreted, thus building knowledge around the concept of a line. Art as investigation can also include investigating the art of others as a form of "research that produces new visual and conceptual insights" (Gude, 2004a, pp. 8). This is accomplished next, when the students view various historical and contemporary "portraits" and partake in dialogue regarding portraiture, as well as the materials, identity, abstraction, intention, and representation that ties to portraiture. These questions are meant to challenge preconceived notions of portraiture and boundaries of art. As a class, we will come up with a definition of portraits and briefly discuss contemporary visual culture, such as "selfies" (See Day 1 procedure in lesson 1-2).

This type of dialogue and art used for investigation is very different from my original material. In my EdTPA lesson, I shared only portraits or works by Andy Warhol, and discussed portraiture from a limited perspective, referring to them as pictures or renderings of individuals, usually from the waist up. Students did not explore contour line, rather they were told the definition of contour line and instructed to trace the edges of a singular printed image that I had taken for their final project. Little dialogue or research occurred. Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner highlight dialogue as a tool for meaning-making in their article, "Teaching as a Subversive Activity." They propose an entire curriculum consisting only of questions, where each question is meant to help students develop and internalize concepts. They believe we can only learn in relation to what we already know, and asking questions is the first step in the

knowledge construction process. (Postman and Weingartner 59-62). I highlight inquiry-based learning in my lessons so that students can build upon their previously established mental constructs regarding portraits, lines and colors.

On the second day, students will be introduced to the project. Instead of taking a picture of each student and printing it out, students will bring in 4-5 pictures of themselves and/or families. The students will show images brought from home and share why these images represent who they are and where they come from. The teacher will highlight various cultural backgrounds that are present in the room, and have students talk about favorite activities or family traditions. Here, I am incorporating the individualities and cultures of the students themselves. John Dewey, an influential progressive educational philosopher and reformer, believes that it is best to highlight the individualistic interests of students when teaching. “[Interests] represent dawning capacities. Accordingly the constant and careful observation of interests is of the utmost importance for the educator” (Dewey, 1929). Dewey urges teachers to tap into these dawning capacities by constructing knowledge around the interests and experiences of the student, therefore I think it is important to highlight personal pictures of the students and their families. Next, the teacher will demonstrate contour line and intention by tracing her own pictures. The teacher will be sure to experiment with rotating pictures, using various details in pictures, and discussing their significance. After the demonstration, students will make a contour line composition, with intention, by deciding which lines in their photographs are important or significant in representing themselves. Students will explore this idea through various compositions on tracing paper first. After they feel they have an adequate composition, one that best represents the student and is aesthetically pleasing to the student, the

teacher will discuss with the student why these lines were traced and what they are trying to show through line. The student will then trace this composition onto a clear projector sheet.

On the third day, students will explore color. In my original lesson, I lectured on the color wheel and how Warhol used colors to represent personality in portraits. Students had to choose 2 analogous colors and 1 compliment, which was strategically placed in hair, skin, and clothes shapes. I chose to eliminate this method, as well as the printmaking section of this lesson. Instead, students are further exploring color relationships, and representing their own colors in contrast to the world around them. We will first look at exemplars of artworks that use color. We will discuss who is creating these works, why, and how. These works vary in genre, time period, and background of the artist. We will discuss visual culture color schemes, including graffiti. We will also discuss art across cultures, and how color can be used to show emotion, personality, and cultural climate. Students will specifically talk about the colors that represent our world today, based on what is happening. They will discuss how they can engage with the world and better it with their “colors.” (see Day 1 procedure in lesson 2-3). Olivia Gude supports teaching and learning strategies that make connections beyond school in her article, “The New School Art Styles: The Project of Art Education” (Gude, 2004b, pp. 7). Through conversations about visual culture including graffiti, the dialogue reaches beyond the classroom. Furthermore, students discuss cultural climate and how they see the world. Thus, through conversation about color, these students are making connections beyond school. Keeping these ideas in mind, student will be given paper and paint to explore color scheme. They will begin with 3 colors to represent their personality, but are free to experiment differently. They will experiment with color ratio and mixing, but be encouraged to keep a strong pigment. They will share their color research and discuss the visual effects of their experimentation with the teacher and classmates. This activity

of researching color relates back to Olivia Gude's principle, art as investigation (Gude, 2004a, pp. 8). Olivia Gude states that "good art projects encode complex aesthetic strategies, giving students tools to investigate and make meaning" (Gude, 2004b, pp. 7). Through this color experimentation exercise, students are researching color relationships to find a method that suits their identity. By exploring color palette, ratio, texture, and mixing, students are constructing knowledge around color, and researching visual effects to express their personality.

On the fourth day, students will paint their contour line drawings. They will refer back to their color experimentations and ultimately choose 1 method to represent their personality. The teacher will demonstrate this part of the project by painting her intended colors on the back of the transparent sheet within the contour line drawing. The teacher will show how to stay in the contour lines to create "interiors." Students may experiment with only painting some interiors and not others, but they must keep some background spaces blank. The teacher will show the students that her colors (personality) will be painted in relation to the background (the world). Students will be reminded of the different colors we may associate with the world and our cultural climate discussion. After painting their contour line drawings, they will paint a separate sheet with one color for their background, which is a representation of their world. This concept is dissected in the previous discussion where we talk about cultural climate and color, and their colors in relation to the world's. Ultimately, the students will create portraits that share a dialogue of how they use their colors to affect the world around them.

Once they are finished with their project, they will write a reflection on why they chose their color approach, both interior and exterior. These reflections will be referred to in the critique, where we will continue the dialogue of color representation, individuality, cultural climate, and what we can do to better our world.

This new lesson sequence reevaluates the concept of a portrait, and encourages much more experimentation and research with line and color. This lesson strongly references Olivia Gude, in that it uses art as investigation, knowledge construction through discipline centered inquiry, and making connections beyond school. In contrast to the original lesson plan, these painting practices are experimental and individualistic. We use line and painting investigations to construct new knowledge of these concepts (Gude, 2004a, pp. 8). We also connect our portraits to the world around us, identifying our relationship to a larger community (Gude, 2004b, pp. 7). This lesson also references John Dewey, and his theory to teach to the interests of students (Dewey, 1929). By bringing in student pictures of themselves and their families, as well as discussing personalities and their own “world,” the teacher is connecting this project to the students as individuals. The inquiry-based learning approach references Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner’s article, “Teaching as a Subversive Activity,” where they strictly use dialogue to build knowledge upon mental constructs (Postman and Weingartner 59-62). The plethora of available questions in the lesson sequence is a way for the teacher to administer inquiry-based learning. Inquiry-based learning is also a highlight of constructivist epistemology, which is dissected in Patricia Hinchey’s article, “Rethinking What We Know.” Constructivist epistemology lies at the core of critical theory, and highly encourages critical thinking. In this case, knowledge is not defined as facts, but it is the meaning behind facts, rather than the facts themselves (Hinchey, 2010, pp. 40-41). Knowledge is therefore constructed by the learners when they investigate preexisting artworks or portraits that show line and color, because they can assign meaning to these works, and ultimately assign meaning to their own portraits through line and color. This type of knowledge is developed through conversation facilitated by the teacher,

therefore it is very important that the students practice discussion around these concepts, and build upon already established knowledge of art and visual culture.

References

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