

ART EMC #151

Instructional Context

[1] I teach art at a medium-sized elementary school with approximately 530 students. The school houses preschool 3 and 4 year olds through fifth grade. I only teach art to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. This fifth grade art class has 21 students ranging in age from 10 to 12. Out of this class 12 are Caucasian, 6 are African American, 1 is Biracial, 1 is Asian, and 1 is Hispanic. Seven of the students in this class participate in our district's gifted program. The students qualify for the gifted program in a variety of ways so actual abilities and personalities of students in the gifted program vary greatly. Two students receive special education pull out services. One African American female receives resource support one period a day, and the twelve-year-old Caucasian male receives social skills and academic support one period a day. One African American female is autistic and mildly mentally handicapped, functioning at the second grade level. She is self-contained and mainstreamed into this class for related arts.

[2] This fifth grade class is generally energetic and happy. They work well with each other and are kind. Most students can stay focused on their work while having a good time. I am the only art teacher at my school and have my own classroom. My art program is not funded by the school, district, or state, so I must formally request money for art supplies from my school's PTO. I plan art to integrate lessons with science and social. Students know that I believe art instruction is important to the quality of life and that I have high expectations for them in terms of working cooperatively to study and experience art.

[3] There are 2 instructional challenges with this class: 1) lack of experience in formally studying, interpreting and evaluating art on their own, and 2) lack of supporting details in analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating art. In the past, they provided brief interpretations and few elaborating details when requested. When asked to evaluate the art, they struggled to give supporting evidence as to why they felt a certain way. Overall, they were knowledgeable of the definitions of elements and principles of design through their whole class discussions; however, there has been little individual accountability in the application of critiquing works of art.

Planning

[4] My primary instructional goal for this particular lesson was for students to use cooperative group skills in order to discuss and write a critique (description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment) of a work of art sponsored by the WPA, Works Progress Administration, and understand the historical significance of the WPA and the work of art. Additionally, I wanted students to compare their critique of the artwork to that of the professionals at the Smithsonian and present their findings and critique to the class. These goals were appropriate for my students because they were based on my state's standards in visual arts, and aligned with fifth grade social studies and language arts curriculum.

[5] I used my knowledge of these students as individuals and as early art learners to enhance student learning in this lesson (:41). One of 3 girls at middle left table was having trouble identifying how the work of art was created, so I pointed her to the identification facts on her work of art. She read out loud that it was oil on canvas. Because I knew she could easily get frustrated, I used humor and pointed to the information, so I was able to keep her on track (2:29). In contrast to the simplistic answer by the 3 girls above, the group of 2 boys at the back left table (green long sleeves, and orange coat) were able to expand on what they knew and related it to the learning

experience they were gaining from telling about their work of art. Boy in green shirt described how the artist created the work of art through the use of sketching, painting using texture, and even a light source to show shadows. Because I felt these 2 students had a strong grasp of the elements and principles, I chose to extend their learning by discussing the difference between shape and form (5:00).

[6] I understood that students learn at different rates. The table of 4 African American girls at the top right table was split into 2 groups. As I walked over to check on their progress, I saw the 2 girls facing the camera had finished description and almost finished with analysis and had a lot of meaningful content related to their work of art. The other 2 girls (black shirt, gray hoodie) were just finishing description. Because of this, I reviewed analysis by reading from the handout and told the girls they should look at the parts of the work of art and that they should work together.

[7] I ensure fairness, equity, and access for all students. All groups had access to my time, guidance, and materials (6:00). I moved to the back left table of 3 boys. Boy in black shirt received special services, and I was aware of his dislike of people looking at his paper. When I said, "What do you have for an analysis, Patrick?" He pulled his paper to his chest. I responded to this action with, "Could you just read to me what you have so far, please?" When he finished reading, I said, "That's good. You can also say there is contrast." I visited all tables multiple times to check in or support them, and gave meaningful feedback to groups and individuals.

[8] Students were heterogeneously grouped. The autistic African American girl seated in the back middle table wearing a white shirt was placed with two girls I knew would make an effort to engage her. I also utilized a diverse selection of artists and artworks. Students were studying high quality work by male and female artists from diverse ethnicities. Examples include: 1) Paper Workers by Douglass Crockwell, born in Columbus, Ohio 2) Subway by Lily Furedi, born in Budapest, Hungary. When planning instruction, I kept Chickering and Garrison's (1987) seven best practices in mind.

[9] Throughout this video I: 1) encouraged contact between students and the teacher, 2) used cooperative learning, 3) used active learning techniques, 4) provided prompt feedback 5) emphasized time on task, 6) communicated high expectations, and 7) showed respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. I used a variety of procedures and teaching strategies in this lesson to promote student interaction with me and with each other. I chose to have students work in groups, so that they could cooperate to complete the project. This allowed students to share what they have learned and provided support for each other.

Analysis

[10] As the video began, most students had finished the description step in their packet, so I used whole group instruction to clarify the next step of analysis, and I demonstrated the process with artwork from the table nearest the camera. I used small group discussion to foster student participation in description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of art and to have students interact with me as I assessed where they were in the project (10:37). I asked the table of three boys (directly in front of camera) what they were working on now. The African American boy in the black responded with, "I don't know." For clarification of what he didn't know, I asked him, "Is it you don't know principles of the elements or is it about the aspects of the work of art you don't know?" This questioning type of using "or" allowed me to quickly determine what he did not know which enabled me to refer him to the packet with the elements so he could use it as a guide to analyze the work of art (4:00).

[11] The three girls in the back middle table (blond hair girl, African American girl, and dark hair girl) told me, "We don't get how the work is created." I asked the blond girl to read the Smithsonian description of the work of art. When she stumbled over the names, I used humor to encourage her. When she read that the work was oil on canvas, I stopped her and asked her to read it again, so they would hear the answer. I directed the students to the correct information and used this guided questioning to allow the girls to discover the answer themselves (13:15). The 3 boys at the back left table were having trouble with interpreting their work of art, so I repositioned the painting so all in the group could see. Then I asked questions to get the boys to refocus on the story as a way to interpret the work of art.

[12] I also used active listening to promote student interaction. Whenever students got too loud or needed new information, I called for "Active Listening" and held up the letter L with my fingers. This school wide symbol quickly got students' full attention. Specifically, in reference to multiple intelligences, I selected teaching strategies that addressed different types of learners. For example, during the lesson, students participated in logical, visual, interpersonal, and existential activities (6:00). "Doesn't he look like he blends into the background? If he stood out, it would look like he didn't belong there. This reinforces the message/purpose of the art ... to show life in a coal mine... close to the earth."

[13] I used a variety of instructional resources and technology during this lesson. I used the Smithsonian Institute's American Art website, <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/1934/index.html> and their online exhibit, 1934: A New Deal for Artists, which provided 80 works of art all from the Works Progress Administration. Because the Smithsonian Institute's website had the best source of historical and cultural information related to the works of art, I selected 15 works for the group folders. I used a website, www.sanfordartadventures.com/, to help create the handout Elements and Principles of Design study guide, because this website provided clear illustrations and activities. The 5-page handout served as a visual reference. I created the description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment question guide because it addressed my state's standards for visual arts. The standards provided a firm framework for what students should know and be able to do when critiquing a work of art. This packet provided each group of students with: 1) pre-assessment 2) a work of art to study, 3) a helpful guide on the elements and principles of design, 4) a critiquing handout, 5) an envelope with the critique of that work of art provided by the Smithsonian Institute, 6) questions to be completed by each group of students, and 7) cooperative learning reminders. You saw teams throughout the video utilizing the handouts to critique the work of art under study.

[14] When the video began, all instructional resources and technologies were already in view. The SMART Board and computer showed the instructional goals and the day's agenda. The students had been working in groups and most had finished the descriptive section, so I used the whole group moment to remind students they should be moving on to analysis and gave them a visual reminder of the procedures and strategies for the day. Also, each group had a teacher-made packet on their table. I can be seen interacting with the materials of the group nearest the camera as I explained the next step. Throughout the video, students can be seen interacting with the materials during their discussions (10:45). Students nearest camera were looking at the painting Gold Is Where You Find It and were discussing how the miners and the background related to each other. The boy in tan referred to the elements and principles handout in the packet, and I flipped through the packet and suggested they look at texture. Additional resources were seen in the room. To the right of the classroom door, posters connected to the WPA were displayed, and word wall containing elements and principles of design were displayed.

[15] I have fostered a learning environment that was purposeful and supportive by establishing cooperative learning team strategies and giving groups a choice as to which work of art they wanted to study. Specifically, students demonstrated teamwork skills by contributing ideas, suggestions, and effort. As a team member, students were expected to exert a high level of effort and perseverance toward goal achievement. In addition, as individual groups were studying art, I moved around the room to monitor and facilitate learning in every group (14:34). The girl in the back right says, "I kind of think... simple and complex for some reason. Things were simpler, then got more modern." This showed she was comfortable processing her thoughts out loud for her teammates to hear. I ensured student support by providing appropriate materials, rigorously monitoring student participation, giving individual and group assistance, and talking with my students in an informal and friendly tone. This positive and purposeful atmosphere was amplified by the classroom's physical features. The SMART Board had steps I constructed to make it easier for all my students to reach. My classroom was set up following the ITI, Integrated Thematic Instruction, principles using soft lighting, and muted colors so as not to distract students from the learning process. This was evident by the use of a table lamp and absence of bright colors on walls. Large tables were used to ensure ample workspace for projects and provide opportunities for cooperation and open dialogue. All students could easily see materials and each other for face-to-face conversations, and all could hear group comments easily. Behind the SMART Board were words from the state Art Education Standards K-5. This was visible for students to refer and use. By the door were examples of art created by WPA artists during the Depression.

[16] I engaged students in meaningful discussion concerning the definition, description, and evaluation of art (6:00). To involve the boy (back to camera) who received special services, I asked what he had so far and he responded with balance. Then, I asked the students to look at the packet and read the definition of contrast. By doing this, I was able to engage my students in meaningful dialogue using the principles of design to analyze their work of art (8:00). The 2 boys in black shirts near the door are looking at the painting *The Subway*. After discussing balance, I made a connection to a commercial about a lady on a subway who was reading her newspaper on her Samsung Galaxy instead of having a paper copy. I related the similarities between their WPA artwork and the commercial. I knew the students would appreciate the connection to popular culture, and the excitement in their voices confirmed my belief (10:37). As I walked up to the 3 boys nearest the camera, I asked them how they were doing. The African American boy on the right side said, "I don't know." I turned his comment into a question to determine what he didn't know so I could address the situation without loss of instructional time and redirected him to the learning goal at hand. I asked, "You don't know what principles to use or you don't know what aspect of the painting you are working on now?" The boy on the left in the tan coat responded with, "We're working on analysis and how the miner relates to the background." I refocused the group by referring them to the principles of design packet.

[17] When I analyzed the discussions, I found the strategy of using cooperative learning teams was effective in advancing student understanding of concepts and processes and developing positive attitudes towards learning. Every group was successful at the working through the multi-step study guide and using discussion, because they took turns talking and listening, asked questions, used the reference packet of materials to work through the steps of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment and had a worthwhile and authentic task. They knew that once they completed their group critique, they could open their Smithsonian packet and compare answers to the experts' answers. In order to advance discussions or give comfort, my role changed from expert to facilitator to coach depending on the level and type of support needed. The focused, controlled, and rich environment allowed students to take intellectual risks as well as be honest about not understanding a concept or process. Some

students reviewed previous learning, while others extended learning or even experienced metacognition.

[18] In order to assess student learning, 1) I observed students and made anecdotal notes during group work, 2) administered and reviewed exit slips, 3) reviewed group study-guide responses, 4) had students individually complete a chart that compared and contrasted their answers with the Smithsonian experts' critique in the sealed envelope in the group packet, and 5) had groups share their results with the class. Students applied cooperative learning skills, understood the difference between elements of the art and principles of design, order of critiquing a work of art from description to judgment, and general connection to social studies, but they had trouble with interpreting art according to my observations/anecdotal notes, study guide answers, and exit slips respectively. Because groups had the most trouble with the interpretation of the study-guide, I closely analyzed the wording of the questions to see what could be causing the students to have difficulty with this step. The students could correctly answer the following: how does the painting make you feel and what does it make you think of? However, they could not give a complete answer to the third and significant question, "What do you think the artist is trying to communicate to you as a viewer?" After careful review, I found three issues that warranted further study related to question design: sentence structure, layout (appearance) of the question on the page, and lack of understanding the term "communication" as it applied to art. In order to determine where the misunderstanding was coming from and advance learning, I will use the assessment information to improve instruction. I will alter the sentence structure, change the layout by putting, "What do you think the artist is trying to communicate?" in bold and teach a mini-lesson on traffic signs and how they communicate to drivers.

Reflection

[19] Overall, the goals of this lesson were strongly met. The students successfully worked in formal cooperative teams in order to discuss and learn how to critique works of art. I believe they were strongly motivated because they had a specific task and were intrigued about having a secret envelope in their folder from the Smithsonian to open at the end of their 4-step process. They felt like they were doing meaningful and important work in art. According to Johnson and Johnson (1991), research showed that groups succeed best with tasks involving judgment. Also, I believe I established an effective environment for discussion, interdependence and risk taking, where I served the students best by being available as a coach, facilitator, mentor, or expert. During the post-group reflection, students had time to systematically reflect on how they worked together as a team to achieve goals, help each other to comprehend content, use positive behaviors, and what they need to do next time to be successful.

[20] This lesson will influence future instruction, because I plan to have students work in teams again, incorporate secret/high interest activities based on meaningful tasks, and have students apply their skills of critiquing art to student generated art. This would give students a two-way connection of skills and process, reinforce cooperation and discussion skills, and strengthen how and why art is made. Additionally, I want to continue to improve my questioning strategies and knowledge of different purposes and types of cooperative learning teams, such as long-term study teams.

[21] If I taught this lesson again to a different class, I would use a laptop cart, so students could assess art sponsored by the WPA on the Smithsonian web site, post their responses with others from around the world, and read blog posts related to works of art and how they compare to curators and art historians. Additionally, I would like to learn more about guided reciprocal peer questioning, question stems and implementation practices, in order to have students generate their own questions while describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging work of

art. I believe this would be an excellent tool for looking at art in the classroom and appreciating art as lifelong learners.

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