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May 13, 2015

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**Synthesis and Conclusion of Concepts in Art Education**

Throughout the semester the Concepts in Art Education course has been exceptionally challenging in a number of different ways. From the course readings, exercises and discussions which pushed us to think deeper about educational theories, practices and the role of the teacher to the overall theme of the role of art education and our experience in service learning this course provided an overwhelming foundation for our careers as art teachers. In particular the service learning aspect of this course provided an opportunity for us to implement the theories we were learning in lecture and experience the application of them. Further, this experience allowed us to reflect on our own experience as well as the student’s learning through the maintenance of a journal and blog. Overall, three themes arouse for me throughout this course: the role of the teacher, differentiation, and artistic growth.

I found the role of the teacher to be the most impactful. All of themes and aspects discussed in this course seemed to relate back to my role as a teacher and how I can be most effective. I learned through my service learning experience what my natural tendencies are when in the role of the teacher, which has helped me identify behaviors in myself, that I appreciate and others I would like to change. When discussing the role of the teacher one of the first things that comes to mind is Bloom’s taxonomy. Bloom’s taxonomy identifies higher and lower levels of learning. As a teacher, you want to foster higher levels of learning, you want to push your students to dig deeper and not just remember and understand but apply, analyze and evaluate key concepts; you want to push your students to use their knowledge to create. In my service learning experience I got to observe this process with my student as I tried to reinforce key concepts within every session and provide opportunities for the student to utilize the concept. For example, one key concept I wanted my student, Dawson, to go away with was the idea that anything can be an art material or tool. We discussed this each session and with each session I tried to provide untraditional materials and allow Dawson to find ways in which they could become a new art material. In this way he was able to create utilizing what he understood about the concept, and by watching him create I was able to assess his grasp of the idea.

In the text, *Differentiated Instruction in Art*, the author discussed the roles of teacher. One of the roles she identifies is the kind of teacher I want to be: the warm demander. The warm demander equally pushes students to achieve more than they believe they can while helping to establish the belief that they can achieve more in themselves. In my experience in other courses, where I have had the pleasure to observe teachers in their classroom, I have noticed this behavior as a staple among highly successful teachers. I see myself, as a teacher, as a partner in learning with my students. I believe the classroom should allow for an exchange of knowledge where both students and teachers are learning and the warm demander allows this to occur.

Another theme throughout the course was differentiation. Differentiation is a crucial part of lesson planning, teacher-student interactions and the overall role of the teacher. Differentiation allows for students to develop the higher levels of thinking established in Bloom’s taxonomy by making the content specifically engaging and relevant to each student. While I have learned the importance of differentiation through this course, my experience in service learning has cemented how difficult it can be. The research of Rhonda Kellogg and Viktor Lowenfeld proved incredibly helpful in my effort to differentiate during my service learning experience. I was able to better understand where my student was developmentally and act accordingly through their research. I identified that my student, Dawson, was in Lowenfeld’s schematic stage (typically seem in children aged 7 to 9 years old). Although Dawson was a high school freshman, the effects of his traumatic brain injury placed him in this category. In this stage children demonstrate an indication of a baseline yet objects still appear to be floating and not grounded. This stage is also categorized by the creation of objects utilizing stacked shapes and colors. According to Kellogg, Dawson is in the representational stage; this is categorized by the tendency to draw a dog for example, rather than their dog. Knowing this allowed me to see Dawson’s drawings as developmentally appropriate and focus on artistic growth in another area rather than trying to push him into another stage. I also learned through working with Dawson that he needs attention and encouragement to stay on task, knowing this allowed me to provide an environment that was specifically suited to his development.

The last major theme I noticed was artistic growth. The biggest idea about artistic growth that I have gained from this experience is that it fluctuates. Children and students move back and forth from one stage of development and/or level of understanding to another. This is one of the key reasons why it is crucial that as a teacher you reinforce key concepts. Just because they understood it yesterday doesn’t mean they are ready to build on it today. I noticed this in my own learning throughout this course and with my student in service learning. As we progressed through this course there were times I felt I understood the ideas and then it felt like I didn’t understand anything. This experience helped me relate to my student and do my best to challenge him but not make the experience to challenging or stressful. Through my experience in service learning I was also able to link artistic growth to the idea established in *Studio Art* of doing versus making. As I watched Dawson create his work I watched him move between doing and making and this helped me recognize that his learning and understanding of key concepts was similar, it was always changing, growing and evolving. Understanding the way learning developed and being able to identify it in my student, I believe, allowed me to be a better teacher at session five than I was at session one.

My experience working with Dawson during service learning was incredibly helpful in my development as a teacher. Not only was I able to play the role of the teacher, creating lesson plans and evaluating my own success and effectiveness, I also gained practical in classroom experience working with an exceptional individual. This experience was challenging from start to finish and I in no way believe that I was totally successful but I learned a lot from every interaction and experience. I have always considering working with disabled individuals and this experience has continued my interest. During my service learning I learned that there is a lot of back and forth in teaching. There were days went everything went smoothly and then the next session nothing did. It was also especially helpful to see the theories and concepts we discussed happen within the classroom. Moving onto the next stage in my development as a teacher I will take a stable foundation of experience and understanding with me to build upon. Most of all this course has proven to me that I do in fact want to be a teacher, as difficult as my experiences have proven it can be, there is nothing else I would rather do.

**Bibliography**

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