

## **AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION IN ART EDUCATION**

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Recent educational studies reveal that the use of authentic pedagogy can boost achievement for students from a variety of backgrounds (Newman & Wehlage, 1993). While there is no particular classroom structure necessary for authentic instruction, there is a need for educators to define their purpose in terms of high intellectual standards. According to Newman and Wehlage the term authentic, is used to distinguish between achievement that is “significant and meaningful and that which is trivial and useless” (p. 8).

There are five primary characteristics helpful in judging the quality of authentic instruction. These traits involve:

- a) the use of higher level thinking,
- b) the substantial conversation about the topic,
- c) peer support for achievement,
- d) acquiring of a depth of knowledge, and
- e) value and meaning beyond the classroom (Newman & Wehlage, 1993).

Discipline based art education offers abundant opportunities for authentic instruction. High levels of cognition are evident in art criticism and aesthetics as students make distinctions, solve problems, and reflect or grapple with complex understandings. As in authentic instruction, students are also engaged in disciplined inquiry with substantial conversation and peer support through art criticism and aesthetics. Disciplined inquiry in art utilizes an established knowledge base of art historical or contextual content and encourages students to explore the relationship of complex issues within a topic or an artwork (Newman & Wehlage, 1993).

Construction of knowledge, as a criteria for authentic instruction, is demonstrated as students are guided to assimilate knowledge through writing or creating art. Rather than rote memorization there is a creation of meaning and learning. These products parallel adult accomplishments in diverse fields, including art, as they have “aesthetic, utilitarian, or personal value to the persons constructing them and to others in the society” (p. 8).

In authentic instruction, education has connectedness to the world beyond the instructional context. Art education utilizing content of contemporary art provides an avenue for students to think analytically, not only about art and artifacts, but also about issues filling their daily lives. An examination of Postmodern art may involve students in critiques of society that include issues of (1) race, class and gender, (2) the environment, (3) personal history, and (4) originality (Milbrandt, 1996).

Historically teaching art in relation to society is not a new concept. It is a practice that has been advocated by Chapman (1978), Feldman (1970), Lanier (1982), and McFee and Degge (1980) and others (Freedman, 1994). Postmodern reconstructivist theory parallels much of this earlier thought in that it typically promotes more whole systems, frames of thinking about fragmentation, promotes collaboration and cooperation above “expert opinion,” and decenters the individual while emphasizing the collective and environmental good (Gablik, 1991). It is often critical of our consumer culture and the controlling effects of mass media (Barrett, 1994). Such a postmodern agenda may provide the impetus to move art education from the peripheral into the mainstream of education.

A conscientious utilization of authentic instructional strategies, embedded within a discipline based study of contemporary art and society, offers additional rationale for supporting a movement of social reconstruction in art education. As teaching methodologies and content are reconfigured, not only is art education reconstructed, but so are students’ abilities for empowered learning and life beyond the classroom.

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