

I) QUESTION:

How does experience in Visual Thinking Skills (VTS) effect the critical thinking skills of the student when communicating about their own artwork?

How can the art teacher support the classroom teacher to identify or track transfer of VTS skills?

II) RATIONALE:

Third grade students with learning disabilities and who have been retained are weak in their abilities in observational skills, creating a context and providing an interpretation of their visual experience, and communicating about their experience.

Visual art can serve as a focus for observation, interpretation and discussion about student experience. VTS methodology, developed by Paul Yenawine and Abigail Housen, is a teaching strategy based on questioning. "The teacher asks open-ended questions adding more probing ones later." "Facilitation stresses expansive, reflective observation and thought as the desired behaviors." (Yenawine, Phillip)

III) BACKGROUND/CONTEXT:

I am an art teacher at Charles D. Wyche Jr. Elementary School which is located in a suburban setting of low middle class homes and apartments. This study was implemented in a single third grade class of twenty students composed of students with learning disabilities and who have been retained. They are diverse ethnically, socio- economically, linguistically, and cognitively. This study was implemented with this class which occurs once a week for one hour.

IV) RESEARCH

Research has shown the validity of using art as a stimulus for developing critical thinking skills. "Art can serve as a starting point for analysis, stimulating the experience of the individual. The student's analysis of an artwork can develop their perceptual and interpretive abilities as they identify the image structure and respond based on their experience." (Eisner, Eliot. *Educating Artistic Vision*. 1997. The Macmillan Company)

The development and theory of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) as Phillip Yenawine states, is based on several antecedent educational theories. "Peers exert greater influence than parents on the shaping of young people's characters and personalities." (Judith Rich Harris) "Through interactions with people and the environment, children slowly evolve a series of ways of understanding what they perceive." (Jean Piaget) "Understanding involves active construction through exploration and reflection. Effective learning, the development of operations that enable an individual continuously to make meaning of new circumstances and use new information, is a slow process." (Lev Vygotsky) (Yenawine, Phillip. *Theory into Practice: The Visual Thinking Strategies*. Presented at the conference of "Aesthetic and Art Education: A Transdisciplinary Approach," sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Service of Education. September 27-29, 1999, Lisbon Portugal. www.vue.org.)

Currently VTS curriculum is being implemented in public schools. In a partnership between the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston Public Schools, and Visual Understanding in Education, VTS methodology is being implemented to improve elementary student learning skills. Research shows that students improved in their abilities to articulate their thoughts and in problem solving skills. (Longhenry, Susan. *Thinking Through Art at the*

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IV) DATA COLLECTION TOOLS:

Students viewed and discussed VTS prescribed art images in approximately ten forty-five minute sessions, implemented over an eighteen week period of art classes. Oral discussion was collected through audiotapes of class discussion. Anecdotal teacher written observations supplemented the assessment tools. A written and drawing interpretation of student artwork was implemented in the beginning, middle, and end of the implementation period. An assessment of student abilities to observe, communicate details, and interpret artwork was analyzed through employing an assessment rubric of student behaviors in an analysis of student oral discussion, written narrative, and drawing. Instances of assessed behaviors were tabulated and graphed to illustrate the number and frequency of the behaviors.

V) ANALYSIS

Several factors influenced the outcomes of the student's critical thinking and communication behaviors including the students prior knowledge/experience, classroom culture, the physical setting, training in VTS strategies by student and the facilitator and implementation time. For example, the social dynamics of the group influenced the student's ability to focus and communicate their thinking orally. Some students were inhibited due to a fear of being judged by their peers. Other students had difficulty maintaining focus on the image or the conversation over time. Additionally, the homeroom teacher and art teacher did not collaborate in the implementation of the VTS strategy in the regular classroom setting. During a museum visit, student analysis blossomed, their conversation with a docent revealed a new found comfort in their analysis of art work. Based on these factors, there was variability in the quality of responses and comfort in participation by the student. Students who consistently engaged in the activities of the study did show development in their abilities to articulate detail and interpretation in the artwork of others and their own art work.

VI) POLICY IMPLICATION

VTS strategies can be an effective method for developing student critical thinking and could be integrated into the instructional strategies of all curricula. Students need a collaborative classroom culture that is supportive of VTS instructional strategies. Training of teachers needs to be consistent and supported by the school culture, providing training time and interdisciplinary and cross curricular collaboration and planning. Students need more experience in sharing conversation and valuing each other's thinking.

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