A CULTURAL MOSAIC: ENGAGING STUDENTS

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B.A., National University, Sacramento, 2000

PROJECT

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

EDUCATION
(Curriculum and Instruction)

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

SPRING
2010
A CULTURAL MOSAIC: ENGAGING STUDENTS

A Project

by

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Department of Teacher Education
Abstract

of

A CULTURAL MOSAIC: ENGAGING STUDENTS

by

Mary Jo Hoffmann

This Project is an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum Development and Instruction with an Emphasis on Arts in Education. It follows Pathway III: Developing a curriculum, project, program, or performance related to arts education or arts in education. This project entailed a personal journey of developing as an arts educator, with an emphasis on visual arts, cultural identity, and diversity in order to engage at risk students. It culminated in a mosaic art installation that reflected the learning and experiences of the students and teacher. This study included research of the rationales for the cross curricular inclusion of arts in education, relevant issues in engaging students of diverse ethnic backgrounds and low socio-economic status and their perceptions of education and the school community, and the history of mosaics in cultural art and crafts. The researcher planned and implemented a curriculum, which resulted in a mosaic art installation and pertinent learning experiences for both student artists and the researcher.

__________________________________, Committee Chair
Karen D. Benson, Ph.D.

____________________________
Date

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DEDICATION

To my mom for always encouraging my creativity and recognizing that drawing on everything I could get my hands on became a canvas, which gave way to a life of creating. To the teachers who have inspired me to be passionate about learning, teaching, and creating. To the students who teach me, as much, if not more, than I teach them every day.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement to the following for help with this project and thesis.

To Karen Benson for your tireless editing and willingness to help and encouragement to keep on going. To Crystal Olson, for literally making it possible for me to finish this journey. My student artists: Sabrina, Steven, Tashalla, Cruz, Bryan, Katherine, Yazmin, Emma, Shaena, Sara, John, Daniel, Nakaiya, Bogdon, Jennifer, Trevyn, Kirsten, Elijah, Brandon, Elijah J, Dima, William, Samuel, T.J., Stanley, Alejandro, Auntione and Daisy. To My friend Ken for the foundation, both literally and figuratively, to make this project possible.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This proposed project for a Master’s of Arts in Education was an art installation. This project was a mosaic created with pieces of tile, broken pottery from the students’ cultures, pieces of glass and found objects. The mosaic reflected the curriculum of fifth grade standards and infused the students’ cultures and contributions of their culture in the founding and building of the United States. The mosaic included the agricultural contributions, religious beliefs, inventions, and other culturally relevant contributions. This project attempted to promote the cultural awareness and identity of the students within the school, the cultural contributions of the students’ ancestors, facilitated a connection between the students, their families, and the school, and encouraged participation and to make an artistic connection to the curriculum prescribed by the school district and State of California.

Importance of the Project

This project’s importance was evident in the culmination of the mosaic art installation and showed the communal effort of multi-cultural students in a cohesive art piece. The process of researching their cultural background and the contributions made by their culture and the depiction of that knowledge through the mosaic process provided the students with a sense of ownership and pride in their art, their culture and their school. The students learned about their culture from a historical perspective and gained
understanding that they were part of this country’s mosaic. Through the process of mosaic, students learned the historical significance of the art form and that it was used in many cultures from around the world. Students then made a connection between the emigration process and the multi-cultural climate of our school. Eventually learned and gained a sense of pride in the differences—that when shared and put together, like a mosaic, beauty was created.

Project Place of Implementation

This project took place at Woodridge Elementary School in the Twin Rivers Unified School District. The student artists were between the ages nine and eleven. The students were representative of many cultures: American, Russian, Ukrainian, Hmong, African-American, Hispanic and Pan-Asian. The school had a 30% English Language Learner population. The student artists were both male and female. This school was located in a suburban neighborhood made up of low socio-economic to middle class. The majority of the school’s population was considered low socio-economic, 82% of the students received free and reduced lunches. The population of student artist involved included students who are identified as Resource, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Gifted and Talented Education (GATE). This project involved student artists with little to moderate art ability. This project created an opportunity for all students to be successful in art history, the mosaic process, and art curriculum. The varied intelligences of learning and doing, used
in the process of designing, researching and installing this mosaic, allowed all learners to be competent and engaged.

Project Procedure

This project began with a survey of what culture the students identified with, their view on and comfort level with the arts, and how connected they felt to the school. The students researched their own culture, and in some cases, multiple cultures. The research included: the contributions of that culture and its effect on The United States’ historical development, including but was not limited to westward movement, settlements, the railroad, agriculture and religion. Student artists were grouped together based on cultural identity or interest. The teacher guided the students in the inquiry and research process. This process included the 21st Century Learning Model in which students asked an essential question personally developed for their specific culture. Students were allowed to do research using technology, reading, and personal interviews. This allowed students a differentiation in gathering information. The teacher taught the history of mosaic art form from different cultures around the world using art prints, virtual field trips, books, and technology. The students learned and practiced the process of mosaic and began with various materials such as paper, magazines, magnetic tiles, shapes and colors of various materials, and, eventually, tiles, found objects, beads, glass and adhesives. The mosaic process was first done on a smaller scale and ended with the finished mosaic art installation, which measured approximately three feet by twelve feet. The installation was mounted in the main hallway of the school. The art installation was unveiled in a
ceremony with the student artists, their families, and the community and school board members.

The reading and literature review revolved around the use of art to engage students in learning their cultural identity, the contributions of their culture to present day America and engaging students. The areas of research included:

I. The importance of arts in education, the need for meaningful experiences for students to become engaged learners and the approach to teaching different types of learners.

II. The historical art form of mosaics in the world’s cultures, the contributions to the United States by cultures represented in the student artists.

III. The theory of making connections for students and their school and how that effects their academic achievement, community building, and students’ self-concept.

The project’s process was documented by journal entries by the teacher and students, pictures, art pieces, reports and writings of the students’ research, and the installation. Research was done by survey, case studies that represented the population of student artists, and observations.

This project affected the future teaching of the educator, found creative ways to engage all learners, and further developed ways in which students viewed their role in their school’s community and the world beyond the classroom. The teacher analyzed
their learning and used reflective journaling, and to document the triumphs and failures of the process. The research goals supported the use of art in education and promoted the learning and community building of young artists. The future implementations for teaching included project based learning and future installations.

This project sparked an interest, used the arts, and implemented the curriculum across grade levels, and encouraged students and their families to seek a connection to the school. It allowed other educators to see the possibilities of using art as a way to engage all learners and to continue the desire students have to create beauty in their world. This project was shared with the school’s population. The progress of the mosaic was posted in the hallway near where the finished mosaic was mounted. The project’s process was shared with staff at regular staff meetings along with ideas to use in their classrooms.

Significance of This Project

The significance of this study was to develop the researcher as an arts educator, through relevant research, pedagogies and practice, and to engage students in learning about the school community, and to create an awareness of their place in the world. The author gained knowledge from researching the scholarly readings throughout the program, research on the art of mosaic, and engaging students in learning. The author learned many relevant techniques through research and practice. The significance for the students was especially important. They learned that education can be fun, creative and relevant to their lives through the process of creating a collaborative art experience.
Definition of Terms

Mosaic art consisting of a design made with small pieces of colored stone or glass

California Standards for Content Instruction- Standards adopted by the California State Board of Education for English-language arts, mathematics, history-social science, science, and visual and performing arts

English Language Learner (ELL)- students for whom English is a new language

Guilloche- intertwined patterns used to border mosaics

NCLB-No Child Left Behind- a federal law that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of schools by increasing standards of accountability and providing parents more flexibility in choosing what school their students will attend

Smalti- a rough surfaced piece of glass tesserae, that contains small air bubbles often backed with metallic, used to reflect light in a mosaic

Tesserae- small pieces of manufactured tile and glass for the purpose of details in mosaics

Title 1- Formally known as Chapter 1, Title 1 is part of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and is the foundation of the federal commitment to closing the achievement gap between low income and other students. Approximately 14,000 of the 15,000 school districts in the nation provide Title 1 programs. The purpose of Title 1 funding was to provide additional resources to state and local governing bodies for remedial education for children of poverty. In 1994 the purpose was reauthorized and
Title 1 shifted the program’s emphasis from remedial education to helping all socio-economically disadvantaged children reach rigorous state academic standards. Title 1 funds can now be used for instructional activities, counseling, parental involvement and workshops, and program improvement. In return, schools, the school district and states must meet accountability requirements for raising student performance.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of developing as an arts educator includes a review of the following areas of review of the literature: The theories and philosophies of the ways in which children learn effectively, the history of arts education, the importance of engaging students and creating lifelong learners, and the cultural history and influence of mosaics.

The history of education is one filled with the ongoing inquiry of how children learn best. Many philosophers have added their theories to the debate. Most agree that in order for children to learn, the children must be engaged and challenged to think for themselves. Almost from the beginning of recorded history of education, teachers have understood the importance of art in education. “In 400 B.C.E., in the Phaedo, Plato recounts Socrates describing two worlds: the murky, tangled world of speech versus the perfect, well-lit world of imagery” (Burmark, 2008, p. 9). This journey of teaching children with the arts continues today. Educators continue to learn from contemporary theorists who include, but are not limited to, Berger, Dewey, Arnstine, and Eisner.

In John Berger’s (1972) book, Ways of Seeing, he examined the concept of how people view themselves, the world around them, and their place in it. Thousands of years after Socrates described the need to experience visual imagery to learn, Berger echoed this idea. “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (Berger, 1972, p. 7). He reiterated the concept that children learn about their place in the world, whom to trust and how to survive by the visual images around them before
they can put words to it. “Good teachers have always known that visual images help learners understand and remember complex information and abstract concepts” (Burmark, 2008, p. 9). In a day where students come to school without a highly developed sense of prior knowledge yet lack of knowledge of the world outside of their neighborhood, it is up to the teacher to provide a well rounded experience of learning. One of the most effective ways to teach abstract concepts is through the use of art. This method of teaching is not limited to the use of imagery; it includes music, movement, and poetry.

Poetry and literature, for example, were invented to say what words could never say and, through what they say, we can come to understand what we cannot state. Science, (Dewey 1934) reminds us, states meaning-art expresses it. (Eisner, 1998, p. 105)

Good teachers provide the canvas on which students experience the art of learning.

Recently, teachers and school districts have been forced to turn their attention from providing meaningful learning experiences to competency testing and outcomes. The debate continues about what kind of teaching is effective and what kinds of people educators want to help foster. The question posed a century ago by Herbert Spencer (1854), “What knowledge is of most worth?” emerges from this debate. Is it the job of the teacher to produce a group of people who can spit out bits of knowledge when they are asked and only for the short term or to create a society of productive and caring citizens? Arnstine (1967) made nearly the same statement about the role of the teacher and the
education system. “Rather than strengthen society and its institutions as they now exist, some educators view the purpose of education as building a new and more humane society” (Arnstine, 1967, p. 343). He made the point that the job of the teacher is viewed by many to create a world of thinkers, inventors, and humanitarians. What knowledge is of most worth? Berger, too attempted the answer and offered this explanation, “…there is also another sense in which comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the world; we explain that world with words but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it” (Berger, 1972, p. 5). The teacher and school have a duty to provide the experiences for students to “see” the world and come to understand their place in it.

Theorists examined in the course of this research agreed that in order for students to become productive, creative, and valuable members of society, learning must be involved in direct experience. What does having an experience mean? John Dewey (1934) described it as an esthetic process in which the participant moves through ongoing series of events. Each of these experiences by the learner eventually moves toward an end or product. At the ends, opposite energies come to an amicable conclusion. While each of their experiences is emotional, they are not defined by the separate emotions within them. Dewey offered this definition:

The esthetic or undergoing phase of experience is receptive. It involves surrender. But adequate yielding of the self is possibly only through a controlled activity that may well be intense. In much of our intercourse with our surroundings we withdraw; sometimes from fear, if only of expending our stored energy;
sometimes from preoccupation with other matters, as in the case of recognition.

Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. To steep ourselves in a subject matter we have first to plunge into it. When we are only passive it overwhelms us and, for lack answering activity, we do not perceive that which bears us down. (Dewey, 1934, p. 55)

This quote outlines the role of the teacher and the students’ experience, when effective teaching is in place. To truly teach the whole child, a teacher must expend energy, and, in some sense the students surrender themselves for at least a short time. The teacher must immerse the student in the subject being taught. The ability to use the arts allows the students to feel, manipulate, sing, rhyme, dance, draw, invent, and plunge into the experience of learning. This is where the surrender ends, and energy is given and received by both the educator and the learner. This ability to reach the child will yield results that engage and inspire the student to learn. Often, however, students become overwhelmed by lack of involvement and learning, becoming discouraged. Unfortunately, it is not just the teacher’s ability to be effective; it is also the constraints of adopted curriculum.

For as long as the ways teachers teach and students learn has been debated, so has the argument continued about what subjects to teach. Both Eisner and Arnstine have grappled with this dilemma. Eisner outlined many ideas about our educational system’s current path in his book (1998), *The Kind of Schools We Need*. He argued that whatever
the curriculum, it is the way in which it is delivered and nurtured that produces lifelong learners. He stated that students, who are exposed to visual literacy as well as the written curriculum, gain a better understanding of abstract ideas, find value in their education, and understand symbols in the world. Arnstine echoed Eisner’s thoughts. “The knowledge and skills presented by schools are to be acquired by students. But they cannot be acquired other than mechanically and on a short-term basis unless they are found meaningful by them (Arnstine, 1967, p. 340). Both agree that without the engagement of the student and the energy of the teacher, students learn for the short-term and do not become thinkers. They are not alone in their theories of the importance of visual literacy in curriculum, teaching and learning.

In 1658, pan sophist philosopher John Amos Comenius published *The Visible World*, considered to be one of the first illustrated books for children. Both Freud and Piaget recognized that young children handle concrete images more easily than abstract words. (Burmark, 2008, p. 9)

This idea has been discussed and emerged in different realms of educational philosophy throughout the centuries and continues today. The concept of visual imagery no doubt has changed over time, from visual art, drama, and music from the beginning of civilization to its contemporary counterparts of computer generated art, illustrated textbooks, and modern poetry in music. The philosophy stays the same, however, that children understand more with the use of the visual in the learning experience.
In a 1982 study, Levie and Lentz reported findings from 55 experiments comparing learning from illustrated text versus text alone. They noted that illustrations contributed to reader interest and enjoyment, affected attitudes and emotions, and provided spatial information that was difficult to express in words. They also calculated that groups using illustrated texts performed 36 percent better than groups using text alone on measured criteria. (as cited in Burmark, 2008, p. 9)

Burmark went on to say that whatever the information, it must be anchored to an image or series of images. He echoes of the preceding theorists and the importance of visual learning and the relevance to an experience.

The pursuit for how best to educate children is as old as time itself and continues to build on theories that have come before. From the first celebrated teacher, Socrates, to men of the last two centuries, to modernists of today, the pursuit never ends. Those philosophers and teachers have inspired countless generations of teachers and learners to keep the search in the forefront of education. Eisner’s quote moves one to work toward the best way of teaching productive thinkers and members of the world’s increasingly diverse population. “Brains are born, and minds are made; and one of the privileges of the teaching profession is to have an important part to play in the shaping of minds” (Eisner, 1998, p. 23). What would Socrates say if he could see what the “well-lit world of imagery” has produced?
Engaging Students

In the State Superintendent’s 2007-2008 report on California’s dropout rate, Jack O’Connell expressed some hope in the fact the graduation rate was up slightly from the previous year, but continued to be concerned about the level of students dropping out.

I am heartened that the graduation rate is up slightly, but California’s dropout rate is still unacceptably high," said O’Connell. "If we look deeper into the data, we see alarmingly high dropout rates among African American and Hispanic students. There are long-term economic repercussions from not graduating for the student, for their communities, and for our statewide economy. These data provide even more evidence of the challenge and the moral imperative of closing the achievement gap as well as increasing graduation rates among all students.

(O’Connell, 2009, p. 1)

With the focus of education being placed on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the measurable achievement in core curriculum, the cries from those being left behind and those teaching them are once again rallying together for a change. It is clear from the data reported that our schools are failing to engage and educate all students. As the data indicates, this is a particular concern for African American and Hispanic students. This researcher and other teachers have struggled with this issue in recent years. There are many thoughts on the best way to engage learners; one way is the revival of art education.
In the article, “The Art in Curriculum Integration,” Marie Schubert and Steven Melnick investigated the effects of implementing arts across the curriculum in multiple age groups, with rural, urban and suburban students at multiple sites. Their study included thematic units ranging from four months to full year projects. From interviews with students and teachers they concluded that analysis of data indicates that students made connections between among different subject areas, thus gaining a deeper understanding of content in all related subject areas. While the students showed a deeper understanding in content areas, does that directly relate to engaging students? The article went on to give evidence of just that, “Findings also suggest a significant increase in students’ positive attitude toward school and in their self-concept” (Schubert & Melnick, 1997, p. 63).

A Historical View of Arts Education

To better understand arts education, one must look back at the history of arts education in schools. Historically, the arts were taught as a separate entity in the daily curriculum. Students went to other rooms to be taught by a specialized teacher. The specialized teacher would often seek ways to relate the art lessons to academic areas being studied and taught in the class. This often became an isolating experience for the student and also excluded students who were less affluent or went to a school that did not offer education in the arts. As education changed with the world’s move into the twentieth century, crafts gave way to fine art, agriculture and industry gave way to academia and capitalism. Theorists emerged with ideas about how to best educate
teachers. Toward the middle of the 20th century such names as Dewey, Eisner, and Gardner began to rally education and educators to teach and recognize students as individuals. It became apparent the education needed to meet the challenges with ingenuity and exploration. Producing future generations that would develop not only CEOs and business leaders, but also thinkers and creators of beauty meant envisioning education differently. The world would continue to be challenged by war and economic hardships in the 1960s, and the movement to create artists as well as industrial leaders would again force the education system to take a hard look at the role of arts education. This theme returned time and time again.

“When arts education became a more integrated part of learning and teaching, the theorists became proponents for using the arts to teach curriculum that was once isolated and disconnected to the arts” (Schubert & Melnick, 1997, p. 47). In the book, Creating Islands of Excellence: Arts Education as a Partner in School Reform, Carol Fineberg (2004) quotes Dewey:

The possibilities for plays, festivals, and pageants…are endless; for it is always possible to find subject matter which will give the children just as much training in reading, spelling, history, literature, or even some phases of geography, as would dry Grandgrind facts of routine textbook type (p. 112).

If students find learning to be enjoyable and are engaged in their education, they are more likely to stay in school and to achieve. “Those involved in arts education have long
contended that well designed art education, when integrated with other subjects serves, to motivate students by making learning more fun” (Shubert & Melnick, 1997, p. 48).

Creating a Well Roudned Student

Aside from the students finding enjoyment in their education, many theorists believed that the integration of arts education in public school serves another and perhaps more important factor in engaging students: improved self-concept and personal achievement. Maxine Greene, a professor at Columbia University Teachers College, said this about the arts,

One of the functions of the arts is to subvert our thoughtlessness and complacencies, our certainties even about art itself. This is how the arts enable true education…to feel oneself *en route*, to feel oneself in a place where there are always possibilities of clearing, of new opening: this is what we hope to communicate to the young. (Powell & Marcow-Speiser, 2005, p. 5)

What she meant is that when the arts are used to engage and teach students in all areas pupils became aware that their possibilities are endless. When students learn and think through problems with creativity, they are armed with the foundation and self-assuredness to solve problems beyond school.

Place in the World: Social Change

In the book, *Arts, Education and Social Change: Little Signs of Change*, Mary Claire Powell and Vivien Marcow-Speiser (2005) moved this researcher beyond the idea that art education develops self confidence and added the idea that art education defines
students’ place in the world and, with that place defined, a responsibility for social change and awareness. Margaret Mead, the noted anthropologist, once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has” (Powell & Marcow-Speiser, 2005, p. 5). The authors made the argument the through arts education, students not only gained a sense of self but a confidence in that inner sense a “faith in what is potential in oneself” (Powell & Marcow-Speiser, 2005, p. 5). It is this sense of self and one’s confidence that Erich Fromm defined as “creativity…being original means one experiences himself as the true center of his [or her] world the true originator of his [or her] acts” (Powell & Marcow-Speiser, 2005, p. 5). Through stories and experiences of extraordinary teachers, students and artists, Powell and Marcow-Speiser further developed and illustrated the idea of art education first empowering the individual student, giving the student a place in the world to effect change and then how collaboration can bring about the change. When they described the art form of collage that was being done by undergraduate students who were going to school to become teachers, they offered an observation, that the collage offered representations from two realms: the self and society. The collage processes and products are not dichotomous, but instead “composed in polyphony-characterized by many voices” (p. 54). The student teachers produced a common piece of art that bridged differences in points of view, ethnic backgrounds, and socio-economic status and saw that the power of working together for a common purpose is the foundation for teaching. Through the collaborative process, art can bring about social change. Educating through
art creates self confident, creative, well-rounded individuals who become the collaborators for change, ingenuity and leadership in the world.

As Paulo Freire reminds us, schools might in fact be the most powerful (and last) site for social transformation because education, as he defines it, is “that specifically human act of intervening in the world.” I would add that it is through the language of creativity that possibilities for change can emerge. In other words, if “art has played a key role in forming our society’s definition of reality,” then it also “has the power to redefine that concept” (p. 54)

Historical and Cultural Mosaics

The history of mosaics is almost as old as the history of civilization. This art form dates back approximately 4,000 years when it was first thought that terra cotta cones were pushed point first into walls for decoration. By the eighth century BCE pebbled pavements were covered with colored stones that created patterns were created. It would be the Greeks almost four centuries later in the fourth century BCE when the pebbled form would become an art form with precise geometric patterns depicting scenes of animals and people.

By 200 BC, specifically manufactured pieces (“tesserae”) were being used to give special detail and range of colour to the work. Using small tesserae, sometimes only a few millimeters in size, meant that mosaics could imitate paintings. Many of the mosaics preserved at, for example, Pompeii were the work of Greek artists. (Humby, 2004, p. 2)
As with the expansion of ancient civilizations, the Romans had their own style and depictions made from mosaics. The Romans used mosaics to honor and celebrate their Gods and continued the theme of daily life and geometric designs. They added the intertwined border called “guilloche.”

With the rise of the Byzantine Empire from the 5th century onwards, centered on Byzantium (now Istanbul, Turkey), the art form took on new characteristics. These included Eastern influences in style and the use of special glass tesserae called smalti, manufactured in northern Italy. These were made from thick sheets of coloured glass. Smalti have a rough surface and contain tiny air bubbles. They are sometimes backed with reflective silver or gold leaf. (Humby, 2004, p. 2)

While the Greeks and Romans used mosaics on floors and patios, the Byzantine used mosaics to cover walls and ceilings. They did not use grout and often placed the smalti at an angle to better reflect the beauty of light in the glass. The gold would follow the viewer around the room from the light refracted in the tiles. The Byzantines absorbed the Roman’s depiction of their Gods into the new formation of the Christian beliefs, as well as decoration and portraits of Emperors and Empresses.

In the west of Europe, the Moors brought Islamic mosaic and tile art into the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century, while elsewhere in the Muslim world, stone, glass and ceramic were all used in mosaics. (Humby, 2004, p. 2)

The Islamic motifs were mostly geometric and mathematical in design. Examples can still be seen today in Spain as well as in Arabic countries. The mosaics in the Arabic
countries used a new technique called “zillij” this is the process of making purposely shaped tiles, worked by hand to fit in a tessellating pattern, to fit like a puzzle and cover an entire surface.

As Europe and other civilizations grew and expanded, the art form of mosaics declined, especially throughout Europe. The reemergence of mosaic happened after the Middle Ages when the industry of tile making flourished. The churches began to commission mosaics to adorn the cathedrals and abbeys in major cities around Europe and the British Isles. By the 19th century there was a revival of the Byzantine style with the building of Westminster Cathedral in England and the Sacre-Coeur in Paris. In Britain, this was fuelled by the concentration of wealth that the Victorian era brought, with increased domestic and public building projects. New techniques for mass-producing tiles meant a renewed of interest in decorative floors. The Gothic Revival in architecture and design looked back to medieval themes – and this was reflected in the way tiles and mosaics were used (Humby, 2004). Another influence in the art of mosaics was a Venetian glassmaker and business man who saw opportunity in using new materials in an ancient art form and the Victorian demand for glass and opulence.

With the arrival of the 20th century and the Art Nouveau Movement the beginning of modern mosaics started to take on their own form, technique and design, as well as the use of new materials, which differed dramatically from the grandeur of the Victorian Era.

In Barcelona, Antoni Gaudi worked with Josep Maria Jujol to produce the stunning ceramic mosaics of the Guell Park (below) in the first two decades of the
20th century. These used a technique known as trencadis in which tiles (purpose-made and waste tiles) covered surfaces of buildings. They also incorporated broken crockery and other found objects, a revolutionary idea in formal art and architecture. (Humby, 2004, p. 2)

Although the concept of using found objects was not a new one, it was the first time that large areas and public spaces were covered with such objects and mixed with more formal tiling techniques. Found objects were used in Victorian grottos. They used shells, buttons, and small toys. This inclusion of found and personal objects connects the artist or commissioner to the art piece and is sometimes called “memoryware.”

A very influential site has been La Maison Picassiette (in Chartres, northern France), the idiosyncratic work of Raymonde Isidore between 1938 and 1964. As a middle-aged manual worker, he covered his entire house and garden with intricate mosaics of broken crockery. His nickname ("Picassiette") came from a French expression meaning a "scrounger": This expression - "pique assiette" - is the name given today to this very popular style of mosaic. (Humby, 2004, p. 3)

The mosaic art form is alive and thriving in the 21st century, although it is often looked at a craft rather than an art. Perhaps that perception comes from the often-dual purpose of a mosaic often used as flooring or decorative elements in kitchen and bathrooms. It is an art form that easily accessed by the common person and is no longer seen as elitist as it was in the Victorian days or long ago when used to depict Gods. The
field of mosaic is rich with new ideas, the incorporation of found, recycled, and natural items as well as new places that have mosaics installed.

Summary

The review of literature explored the theories put forth by educators and artists about the importance and relevance for arts education in public education. While there is indication that teaching arts has a direct affect on the students’ self-perception, academic achievement, and connection to their community and the world, it is difficult to prove. This researcher and experts agree that the justification for including arts in education should be based on the intrinsic value. In the current climate of cutting budgets, the arts are the first to be cut from the educational experience. The literature supports the need to fight for arts education and for the future of the world.
Chapter 3

THE PROJECT

This Project is an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. The project follows Pathway Three: Developing a curriculum, program, or performance related to arts education or arts in education. The project entitled, A Cultural Mosaic, was conducted through the narrative inquiry method. Narrative Inquiry is a method of research, which has been used throughout history to give firsthand accounts of experiences. This technique used observations, journals, and primary source conversations, as well as evaluated the students’ work and understanding. This chapter and the one that follows are written using the first person. This chapter describes the process of the mosaic project, the student artists, their community and school, and the researcher.

The project was an art installation, a mosaic made of tile, glass, found objects, glass beads and the student artists’ family dishes. The mosaic is approximately 4 feet wide by 16 feet long and was hung in the front hallway of Woodridge Elementary School. I chose to do an art installation as my project for a few of reasons: to create a sense of beauty where sometimes it is hard to find, to create a sense of community in a community that sometimes is divided by language and ethnicity, and because I am a visual artist.
Personal History

I have been painting and selling my artwork since I was 12. A local artist trained me in the Old Masters style. I also have done some professional photography. I became interested in photography when I was an art major and attended American River College. I learned black and white photography and how to develop my own prints from a local photographer and artist, Kurt Fishback. Eventually, I became his teaching assistant and helped teach young artists the techniques I had learned. I am also a musician; I play the viola. I play in the community as part of the American River Orchestra, as well as, around town when invited. The arts are a very important part of my life, and I was lucky to have been offered the opportunities to experience them throughout my education. Advocacy for art education seems a natural quest for me, as does the almost innate need to teach art to my students. The arts are truly a passion in my life.

Context of the Project

Woodridge Elementary School is located in the Sacramento community known as Foothill Farms. Foothill Farms was a middle class neighborhood in 1960-1980 until the closure of McClellan Air Force Base. With the closure and loss of jobs and revenue to the area and schools, the socio-economic climate changed dramatically. The residents of the past had raised their families and were becoming a retired generation and then leaving the community. Large complexes and condominiums began attracting young families and many families on assistance. The ethnic climate began to diversify as well. Predominately white neighborhoods saw an influx of African-American families, a large population of
Hispanic families in the late 1980s, and, more recently, Hmong and Eastern European people. Woodridge was built in the 1970s and burned to the ground in 1976. It was rebuilt as a modern, progressive school, whose teachers are seen as an example of a new way to teach and learn. The school consisted of one main building. The library sat low in the middle of the school, and directly above it was the office. The hallways once wrapped around the library and led to open walled centers named for the direction on a compass. Each center had four teachers, and students moved from center to center each day, based on an individual plan they made about what they wanted to learn that day. It was a remarkable school.

The school climate changed with the changes to the community. It, however, remains a remarkable school. In the time of the open centers there were about 300 students. Today the school has approximately 660. Another 100 students are at the preschool that shares the land. Of the 660 students, 245 are considered English Language Learners (ELL). Woodridge is considered a Title 1 school, a designation given to schools that have a large population of socio-economically deprived students (SED). A school is given the designation of Title 1 is by the percentage of students who receive free and reduced price lunch. Woodridge has approximately 92% of the entire student body who receive free or reduced lunches. Woodridge is also educationally labeled a school “on watch” because of its low California State Test (CST) results over the last two years. The school as a whole has not reached the statewide target for proficient and advanced students.
I chose to teach at Woodridge because I went to school in the former Rio Linda School District, now Twin Rivers Unified School District. I did not go to Woodridge but I grew up down the street from it and went to the junior high and high school our school feeds into. I recently moved back to my childhood home and live about three blocks from the school. Living in the neighborhood where I teach is very interesting, I have a realistic, sometimes depressing view of my students’ lives and challenges. I say depressing, but it is often encouraging to know that most of them make it to school most everyday despite their hurdles. I started at Woodridge ten years ago and have seen many students thrive, becoming champion athletes, high school graduates, college students, service men, criminals, gangsters, and even teenage parents. It is always an interesting emotional journey through the neighborhood to and from school.

Although at one time Woodridge was state of the art in its architecture and wooded grounds, it has begun to show its age. The walls in the entrance are dark brick, plus an oatmeal colored, tacky surface. While the outside has recently been revamped, thanks to a bond measure, the inside does not say, “Welcome, this is a place where learning is a thing of beauty.” When the students come through the doors in the morning and leave through them in the afternoon, I want them to say, “Wow, this place means something to me, and I mean something to it.” The neighborhood itself has its divisions and lacks a sense of community. The rental properties go uncared for, garage doors close at night, and people stay inside when darkness falls. Those not indoors have ways of keeping people inside. Many languages and cultures are represented in the
neighborhoods, but they are isolated from each other because of lack of communication and fear. This mosaic was made by the very community members who do not often speak to each other when they are away from school. It was made by diverse artists with a common goal, to create beauty.

The Process

The use of the 21st Century Learning Model was implemented this year at our school and in our district. I was part of the piloting team at Woodridge. The model used technology and project based learning to promote student directed learning, to construct knowledge, and to value learning beyond the classroom setting. When I was presented with the opportunity to be a part of this teaching, I saw the parallels to this project. It seemed a natural fit for engaging students in making connections to their learning, to their school community, and the world around them.

The process of creating the mosaic mural began the first day of school for my fifth graders. I told them that they would be involved in a project that would connect them to their school forever. After the chatter died down, I explained what I meant. I told them that I go to school to become a better teacher and that I was going to help them make an art piece. They asked many questions. I explained the minimum plan and told them that as the year went on, we would learn and create more on our way to completing our project.

The students and I began the mosaic process by first looking at examples of mosaic work on the Internet. Our school was renovated this year and part of the
renovation included the addition of SMART board technology. This technology is interactive and linked to the Internet. The former white board that teachers have written on for years has become an interactive computer screen, as well as a writeable surface. This technology allows students to access the world at the touch of a finger. We were able to see mosaics from around the world and through history. Students were asked to describe in narrative form what they observed about the mosaics. They were not given parameters on how to describe what they saw for this first writing assignment. This observation by the students allows them to organize, evaluate, and synthesize information. This is the first concept in 21st Century learning, called the Construct of Knowledge, and a natural beginning for students to look at art. I wanted to observe their use of descriptive language and their ideas about art without prompting them to answer in an academic way.

Next, the students thought of their favorite thing. The items they chose ranged from a violin, a toy, their faith, to their favorite food. This was a very popular subject, especially with the boys. The students then wrote a descriptive essay about their item. The writing had to include all the senses and make the reader experience how they saw their item. After their writing was complete and evaluated by their peers and me, students developed a visual representation of the item. The visual representation was a drawing that they colored, using crayons and colored pencils. When they were satisfied with their drawings, I explained and demonstrated how to draw an outline of the item. We talked about what lines were important to clearly define the object. The students then drew their
outlines. They used their original, colored drawings to determine what colors they would need to fill in the outlines. The students used torn construction paper to mosaic their drawing. They needed to use higher thinking skills to determine the size of pieces they would need to fit into a predetermined area. This skill would later come in to play when we did our tile mosaic.

Beginning a Cultural Mosaic

The student artists who participated in the creation of the mosaic were my thirty-fifth-grade students. The creation of this project had many steps and built on art and writing techniques that were taught throughout the school year. The students used their prior knowledge skills of descriptive writing and research techniques to begin the final steps of the mosaic. They were assigned the task of interviewing their family members about where their ancestors came from and about their journey to America. This posed a problem for some students, but was easier for others. It was far easier for the students whose family was newer to America. The students who found it more difficult were the African-American students and the Caucasian students whose families go back many generations. These students were frustrated by the answers they received from their family. The students then wrote an essay on whatever information they could get from their family interviews.

The content of the mosaic was dictated by the ethnic groups represented by my students, which is a smaller representation of our school’s population. The mosaic is made up of four panels each representing an ethnic group: Asian, African-American,
Hispanic/Latino, and European. Each panel is four feet tall by three feet wide. Each student researched a contribution made to the growth and development of American. The contribution had to be something that made a substantial change in the American culture. The students were allowed to research a culture other than their own if they liked. Some chose to do another culture other than their own, but most picked the one they identified with. The students were not allowed to proceed to the next step in the process until they had finished their research report on a specific culture and its contribution. This criterion worked well to motivate students who do not like to write. It also forced the students with behavioral issues to complete an assignment as.

Once the students had their essay completed and turned in, they began developing a picture that represented their cultural item. They drew the picture as realistically as possible and colored it. Like the favorite item assignment, they were directed to make an outline drawing of their piece, in order to simplify it. I explained that small details would be hard to mosaic with pieces of tile, so they used problem-solving skills to represent some difficult articles with less description. Some of them became discouraged at times with having to redo the drawing multiple times. However, they all completed the task, and the real fun began.

As with all construction, we needed some guidelines and rules about safety. This was especially important for the students with ADD/ADHD, who tend to be impulsive and need more structure. The students were instructed that they must wear safety glasses at all times, whether breaking tile and glass themselves or in the presence of others doing
it. This part was very exciting to most of the students. The students then took the pieces of tile and broken glass and placed them on the outline drawings they had created. This gave them a sense of how the pieces would fit into their design before they permanently adhered them to the mosaic board. I drew the students’ designs on to the Hardy backer board in black marker. The students were responsible to fill in their outlined design with tile, glass, and beads. We worked side by side, and they started placing the tile pieces on the backer board to fill in their designs with tile thin set. They used problem-solving skills to fit the pieces. They had to break more tiles as they went along to allow for curves and small spaces. They had to work next to one another and had to be aware of what was happening around them. This was a new way of thinking for them. They are a population of students for whom getting along or being aware of others is not how they usually operate.

Once their individual design components were completed, the students helped fill in the background of each panel. Each day more and more of the mosaic was completed. After each day of creating, we covered the mosaic with a tarpaulin to protect it from other students.

The mosaic is installed in the front entrance of the school, which allowed people who passed by to see the daily progress. The student artists were proud when they began to hear compliments and expressions of amazement from bystanders. Their pride in themselves, in their creation, and in their school developed and grew as the mosaic grew and took shape. Through this process, students were engaged in learning, connected to
the curriculum, and built connections to the school and surrounding community.

Moreover, they developed a greater self-awareness through creating art.
Chapter 4

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project was an exciting experience, but not without challenges. I went into this project with a vision of what I wanted the mosaic to portray. One of the struggles was getting everyone who would be involved to see my vision and understand it. Other challenges included time and money. In working together to overcome the challenges, the students, the school community, and I found that by creating collaborative piece of art, we have created a climate of self and social awareness, pride in ourselves and the school, and a belonging to something greater than ourselves.

In teaching the process of mosaic, I learned that when challenged, the students were capable of persevering, even when the work was tedious and their results didn’t satisfy their expectations.

When I daydream about how my sugarcane will look and how I like it. But it didn’t turn out how I thought it would when I thought about it. It was kind of frustrating when you can’t find the right piece to still on the mosaic. But, most of the time it is fun because when you get a piece, BAM! It fits. I love to mosaic now. (K, 2010)

I learned that some students were afraid of art and did not think they were good at artistic endeavors. The students began to see themselves as people, who when challenged and guided by me, could create beauty. They became part of collaborative a process and began to see beauty and worth in what their classmates have created. Social groupings
began to break down, and students who hadn’t previously associated with each other were working together to reach common goal. I started to notice that the students who sometimes refrain from participating in class discussion have become leaders and quiet pillars of consistency. This process has helped me to see all of my students in a different light. In the hours of working with small groups of children, I had the opportunity to talk with those children away from the academic arena. I got to know them on a different level. The conversations consisted of what they watch on television, the sports they play, their families, and their fears and hopes and goals for the future. This project has even changed the possibilities they have for their future occupations. Some could even see themselves as artists. This experience has only reinforced my view of the importance of teaching the arts in education.

One of the driving reasons to do a collaborative project was to engage students in the school’s climate. I think the following student sums up this idea beautifully.

I feel that the mosaic idea was a great and brilliant idea. It will make our school look more colorful and it will make it feel more like our home. I like that kids also have an opportunity to create a mosaic and have fun. I expected it to be beautiful, and it is! I hope one day that you too, will be able to create a mosaic yourself. It is a great way to make you happy and want to come to school. (W.S. 2010)

Through this experience I have grown as a visual artist as well. I had no previous knowledge of mosaic art. A major challenge was: How do we do this? I researched the mosaic art form through research for this thesis. But, researching and creating a mosaic
are very different. I asked a lot of questions at the Home Depot and Lowes, and I tapped into the resources of friends and parents in my school. I relied on other people to complete the mosaic as well. It became easier to find people to help, once they saw the mosaic come to life. Parents and grandparents, who stopped in the hallway on the way to pick up their students, began to bring us tiles they had at home. Other faculty members who walked out each day began to stop, and, eventually they asked to help. They would start by saying that they could only stay a short while, but once they began putting on pieces, they would be sad that their time went so quickly. Since I did not know much about mosaic, the father of one of my students grouted the finished project for us.

Even though I really enjoyed the project, and we all learned a lot, it did have its challenges. The most significant one was time. It was impossible to have each student work on the mosaic all at once. That meant having six to eight students work on their individual pieces, while the other 22 students were occupied and learning on their own. Some students did stay after school almost every day to complete the mosaic. Also, there were days when my grade level partners took the students not working on the mosaic outside to do physical education. Eventually, all the creative ways to use time gave way to a beautiful piece of art.

Recommendations

If I were to tackle another large project like this mosaic, I would plan the time better. I would have started earlier and invited more adults to help. I would seek grant money opportunities to fund such a big project. Money was not too much of an issue
because our school had some funds left for teacher projects. However, in light of the current economic crisis in education, alternate sources would be necessary to undertake creating a large piece of art. I would definitely recommend that any teacher train a small group of students in the proper way to set up and clean up the area in which the project will be done. I had two students who were a tremendous help in getting the area ready and cleaning it up after all of the groups worked. Without their dedication and hard work, this project would have been much more difficult.

Conclusion

Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results. John Dewey (1934, p. 135)

I am grateful for the opportunity to have been the facilitator of such a wonderful project for my students. I use the word, facilitator, because I feel as though I stepped out of the role of a teacher. Although I taught them the process of research, safely using materials and the process of mosaic, it was their creativity and vision that really produced the piece of art. I learned as an educator through my course work about the need for arts education and the theorists who support the ongoing quest for better schools and student learning. I learned as an artist a new medium of art in which the artist can create in a very primitive way. This project reinforced my innate belief that creating is good for the soul: mine, the students’, and the community’s that shared in the process. We all will continue to share in the beauty that was created.
REFERENCES


