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SHARED READING STRATEGIES IN SECONDARY ART CLASSES: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Introduction

Louis Smith's chapter on biographical method in Denzin and Lincoln's 1994 text refers to the "reflective practitioner", a term first used by Schon (1987). It reminds teacher educators that "Clearly it is one thing to be able to reflect-in-action and quite another to be able to reflect upon our reflection in action so as to produce a good verbal description of it; and it is still another thing to be able to reflect on the resulting description" (Schon, 1987 in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 293). Eraut (1995) expands on these ideas suggesting that Schon "neither analyses everyday practice nor attempts to consider how reflective processes might serve different purposes or vary from one context to another". Eraut (1995:10) also discusses Schon's knowing-in-action term which refers to practice-based know-how, "the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge. We reveal it by our spontaneous skilful execution of the performance; and we are characteristically unable to make it verbally explicit". This paper presents a biographical snapshot in which reflective practice facilitated making some routine implicit strategies from one context explicit in a new context.

Liaison visits to pre-service teachers on school experience and discussions in follow-up on-campus sessions have become special triggers for reflective thinking in my new role as an art teacher educator. Immediately when visiting students in various school placements I am reminded of personal teaching experiences; the ways in which learning materials were searched for and organised, the playground wounds, staff meetings, parent interviews ... everything is suddenly familiar. This familiarity tends to dull somewhat back in the world of lecturing, tertiary course development and assignment marking. And I have only been out of the school classroom for three years.

Some questions about motivation which my pre-service teachers asked during and after a recent placement in "real settings" appeared at first mundane or obvious. In contrast to the perceived university focus upon academic rigour and theoretical tasks, practical aspects like classroom management strategies and pupil motivation can remain blurry. Turney et al. (1986: 6) listed "motivating pupil interest and response" as a major recurring concern for beginning teachers surveyed in Wey's 1951 study. Years later it seems that this issue is still one which teacher education programs tend to gloss over. I realised that one such blurring existed for this group of secondary education pre-service teachers, whose teaching subject was in the very visual area of art. The use of shared reading strategies for motivating pupils is more common, I suspect, in high school subjects like English or history, which traditionally revolve around comprehension of written texts. My students' questions about motivating their pupils inspired valuable discussion and in the process illustrated some critical attributes which Copeland et al. (1993: 347-359) make about reflective practice in teaching. These

include identification of a problem, generating solutions, testing solutions and learning from reflective practice. Doyle et al. (1994) present a similar model for teacher education with attention to describing/contextualising, bringing cultural capital, engaging, problematising dominant practices and discourses, and functioning as intellectuals and cultural workers.

Rationale

My observations of their teaching practice, combined with questions posed by these student teachers, prompted me to recall and share explicitly some motivation strategies. They were part of that teaching baggage which I had not thought relevant in the secondary art education context and had consequently not made explicit. The problem was that the art education students were wanting to involve rather disinterested secondary pupils in reading speaking and writing about art concepts/content from texts and task sheets. This is a compulsory part of the Queensland secondary art education curriculum which includes making and appraising art. The text-based lessons usually introduce relevant aspects of art theory, history, context and appreciation with the intention of facilitating literacy. For a number of reasons, the pre-service teachers were rushing through readings or providing easy summaries of art content required by their pupils for follow-up theory tasks or practical components. They felt pressured to move quickly on to practical art making, which the classes enjoyed more than the theoretical component. Some of the experienced supervising teachers also modelled this practice and argued that pupils refused to either read silently in class or complete reading as a homework task. So, to provide basic information for all class members, the teachers quickly read through the text to the class, to be sure that access to information was not an excuse for non-completion of a related assignment. A major difficulty was that some pupils were still not actively listening and tended to disrupt those who wanted to listen. One could argue that the disruptive pupils should have been removed, counselled about their behaviour or prevented from doing the practical artwork but they would then fall further behind.

Much of my own teaching had been in primary settings where incorporating games and playful activities was an automatic and (upon reflection) invaluable motivation strategy. If one resorted to reading slabs of text to early childhood or primary students (unless a riveting story), the reponse would be immediately noticable in the children's restlessness and noise level. By contrast, a dazed orbiting expression would come over them and question time yielded a loud silence. It did not seem so different in these secondary art classes, except that the pupils were larger and the fidgeting was louder in the non-carpeted workspace. It is highly unlikely that any higher-order questioning or discussion about concepts can develop unless pupils acquire some basic knowledge on art topics to begin with. Perhaps game-oriented shared reading approaches would capture and hold their attention, giving them all a better chance of listening actively and succeeding in comprehension of the information.

The professional critical question-based context of our on-campus discussion sessions problematised pupil motivation. This led to an incidental recounting of some simple games and strategies which I had used in similar situations with primary and early childhood learners. As the list of strategies grew, my students asked for the strategies in writing or, alternatively, a reference which would give them these practical ideas. I had never written the ideas down and did not know of a reference which specifically dealt with such strategies but could remember most of the games quite clearly. My pre-service teachers adapted and

developed many of the suggested strategies and incorporated them into the subsequent final teaching placement. They reported considerable success with pupils who, in their previous lessons had been disinterested and disruptive and who would not participate in any text-based activity. As well as feeling that our on-campus discussions had directly addressed a problem in the school settings, students (who have since graduated) made it clear that just talking with them about my own teaching experiences was more valuable than I would have anticipated. I believe that this experience illustrates what Martinez (1989: 35) advocated. “It is important that we as teacher educators address not only the development of reflectivity in our student teachers, but also our own modeling of the role of critically reflective practitioners”. Martinez (1995: 7) builds upon this notion, saying “There is no denying that we owe pre-service teachers knowledge and support for the doing of teaching as well as for the knowing about it. For teachers in higher education, critical borrowing from classroom to campus will allow us to build rich knowledge bases from which to move forward”.

One might consider the motivation strategies which are described in the next section to be “carrot-dangling” or excessively extrinsic, but alternatives must be considered when intrinsic motivation in learners is not adequately developed. What follows is a summary of shared reading strategies which are aimed primarily at:

- creating a game approach to sharing written texts in secondary art classes;
- holding pupil attention through a more active listening mode;
- providing pupils with quick review, summary and comprehension clues;
- purposefully highlighting for pupils key language in art theory/appaising lessons; and
- supporting pupils who might use disruptive behaviour as camouflage for their reading difficulties.

The strategies may not all be appropriate for all classes and knowing your group will influence the choice (or at least the sequence) with which you might experiment. Most strategies initially require a little extra preparation on the teacher’s part but as reported by my student teachers, may be well worth the time if the pupils become hooked on reading (or at least tempted to participate). It is also important to share with pupils the nature, expectations and value of the selected strategies.

Shared reading strategy ideas

1. Put key information in point form onto overhead transparencies to focus the whole class occasionally throughout the reading.

2. Individuals read aloud in a volunteer round robin strategy or as invited by name. Similarly, students may commence reading and then nominate another reader when they have had their turn. Some students will respond better to a peer’s invitation than one from a teacher.

3. The teacher reads aloud and pauses at appropriate points and asks someone in particular to complete the word/ sentence/paragraph.
4. Students share read in pairs or small groups.

5. Before reading commences, students number 1-10 or 1-20 on paper. They then write a specified first letter beside each number. As reading progresses the teacher pauses at key words which match the first letter clues recorded. Students write them. This acts as a summary and vocabulary bank for visual diary work.

6. Students are asked to highlight key words on photocopies of the text. Try sharing a copy between two. The teacher might pause after a paragraph and ask students to choose only four words which summarise the main ideas of the passage. Only these four are marked with highlighter pens. Working in pairs can support weaker readers and encourage cooperative activity.

7. Give the students acrostic starters onto which art vocabulary from the text might be built, e.g. IMPRESSIONISM (written vertically on the page). The first letter "I" could refer to IMAGES, while the second letter "M" might be completed by writing in MONET . The third word might be PAINTERS or POINTILLIST. Some letters may allow multiple responses or facilitate expansion into poetic verse.

8. The teacher can alternate reading aloud with asking students to silently read or pair read a passage. Audiotaping of passages can be a useful resource in various contexts.

9. Unison reading or group reading by girls, boys, half the class, the front table of students and so forth.

10. The word "photography" might be searched for after the initial class reading using a partial clue on the blackboard p_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ y. Students may need to reread (or at least skim) sections to fill in the missing letters of such key words.

11. Prepare key sentences which have their beginnings and ends jumbled on opposite halves of a page. Students cut and match and paste the correct pairs re-creating the meaning. A simpler version of this strategy is to join with crossing lines the sentence beginnings on the left half of the page and the endings which are on the right half of the page. Colour coding or numbering can also help match the pairs quite quickly.

12. Simple written cloze exercises can be prepared which allow quick review of vocabulary or information, e.g. scrambled letters, gaps in sentences to be completed, wordograms, crossword puzzles, findaword (mazes).

    A collage artist: **eJanein kBare (Jeannie Baker)**
    Three principles of design are **U_ _ _ Y, B _ _ _ _ _ E, R _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ N.**
    (unity, balance, repetition)

Words about ‘Poster Design’ → to arrange into a wordogram

contrast
focus
simplicity
message

C										
O										
N										
T										
R						F				
A						O				
S	I	M	P	L	I	C	I	T	Y	
T						U				
				M	E	S	S	A	G	E

13.A variation of the acrostic (No.7) is to ask students to record a number of clue-providing words during the reading. When completed, they are then given final clues, e.g. they might record the following words prompted by the teacher during a reading session : *primary, secondary, complementary, analogous, contrasting, monochromatic, ochre, hue, tint, shade* and *light*. The clues for the final word are: choose the first letter in the second word, then the first letter in the first word, then the last letter of the seventh word, next the first letter of the fifth word, then the first letter of the ninth word, followed by the seventh letter of the sixth word, next the middle letter of the eighth word, and finally the third letter of the third word (SPECTRUM).

14.Students may be asked to do a quick yes/no or true/false response to some related questions at the end of the reading. Multiple-choice exercises can also add variety.

15.Ask students to write a three-sentence summary of a section/ passage.

16.Organise a quick team quiz activity in the game show genre... buzzers essential!

17.Some readings might deal with information which needs ordering or sequencing, e.g. dates, procedural steps. Ask students to rearrange jumbled versions into the correct order, by numbering, cutting, pasting, grouping, etc.

18.Give each student a written question which relates to the information. At the end of the reading ask all students (or just some) to read out their questions and what they think the answers are, or where they were mentioned in the reading. This can also be done in pairs to initiate some cooperation and discussion.

19.Key words, themes, people or ideas can be represented in simple diagrams. Students may be asked to prepare the diagrams/boxes/flowcharts with headings and beginning letters then complete the summary information at appropriate points during the text interaction.

20.Wherever possible, relate the theory and text work to works in progress or about to be commenced in practical sessions. Pupils can also be asked to design their own versions of

these kinds of tasks, once familiar with style and purpose. Not all students need to do the same task. Variety is the key when beginning shared reading with less-motivated students. Some activities become "favourites" which can be rewards for increased participation and cooperation. Gradually the emphasis can shift beyond basic recall and comprehension to higher-order thinking and discussion tasks. It is also important that the tasks remain fairly brief so they don't appear to be major exercises in themselves or take up a disproportionate segment of the lesson. Aspects of the simpler types can also be trialled as homework tasks, e.g. provide final clues toward solving a word game at the end of class so pupils go away thinking about or revisiting aspects of the text at their own pace while trying to solve the quiz.

Activating participation in the reading process is what these word games target. Teachers and students receive tangible immediate feedback regarding comprehension of the content. Shared reading can therefore be a useful diagnostic tool for literacy in secondary art teaching.There is no claim that the strategy ensures quality art learning. Shared reading can accompany both a narrow, famous-dead-white-European-male, chronologically-oriented art program, or one more equitable in terms of gender and cultural inclusivity. The content, if irrelevant, may, of course, be another reason why pupils are not motivated in the first place. In the shared reading process students are focusing on important language which is a vital aspect of describing, analysing, interpreting and critiquing art. The tasks should be fun for the students who initially don't want to read and a challenge for those who do, with opportunities for many levels of success incorporated.

The first reason for writing this paper was to share some practical ideas for integrating reading into the secondary art context. They may be equally useful in other subject areas. The second impetus was to reflect upon the reflective on-campus context which prompted an explicit documenting of these ideas. Had my students not signalled the topic as problematic then we would not have focused upon discussing and trialling shared reading ideas in the subsequent teaching round. Neither would we have made space for such a constructive, informal time where I could reminisce about my own teaching and they could see the potential to transform my memories into new teaching practices for the secondary art context. The topic of shared reading strategies has since been incorporated into our on-campus art education sessions before teaching practice rounds. The pre-service teachers find, too, that some of their supervising teachers ask about the ideas and specifically build them in to their teaching repertoire. The capacity for sharing and adapting ideas grew from the space created for reflective practice and thinking about improving the teaching/learning partnership.

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