

The benefits of butterflies

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Teaching art is an aspect of the curriculum that many teachers avoid because of feelings of inadequacy fostered by a lack of confidence in terms of personal 'artistic' skills. Informal surveys of first year students in primary teacher preparation programmes at the University of Waikato suggest this lack of confidence is prevalent before the students have even begun a basic introductory art curriculum module. An important aim of this module is to challenge and positively affect the attitudes of the students. Therefore, alongside developing foundation understanding of art education, the course outline offers to enable participants to '... approach the teaching of art with confidence and enthusiasm' (Department of Arts and Language Education, 1995, p.1).

This article relates how a component of the module was integrated into a junior syndicate science unit at a local normal school. As a consequence, the experience was effective in helping students feel more confident about teaching art. The data was collected from three different participants in order to achieve triangulation (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Reflections of the university lecturer teaching the module, a student teacher participating in the module, and a teacher at the participating school are described. The data suggest that there was affective and effective success for participants when using a partnership model between university and school. The data also show that it was not only the student teachers who stood to benefit from this particular aspect of the module but concurrently, there were distinct advantages for children and staff of the school.

Introduction

A significant aspect of a one semester introductory art curriculum module for first year students at the University of Waikato is the combination of theory with practical teaching experiences. In preparation for one of these practical components, a School of Education art curriculum lecturer visited a local normal* school to discuss possible dates and times for the pending practicum. During negotiations the lecturer commented on an eye-catching poster on the wall of one of the classrooms which was promoting a future display at the Hamilton Museum of Art and History. The classroom teacher explained that the whole junior school had arranged to visit this forthcoming exhibition, *The Butterfly Man of Kuranda*, in two months time. Viewing this extensive collection of the entomologist F P Dodd, while it was on display at the museum, was to be a feature of a science unit on the topic of butterflies and moths that the staff of the junior school had planned around the exhibition. It occurred to the lecturer and the teacher to integrate the school's already prepared unit into the art

*a cooperating school in the vicinity of the university.

curriculum module. Furthermore, the museum resource could usefully be incorporated into the art curriculum practical experiences. An outline was cooperatively drafted and themes from the art curriculum module, *development of art knowledge and skill*, *sources of motivation* and *teaching an art process*, were linked to the school's planned activities. The principle of partnership, whereby participants consult and collaborate from a position of shared status and decision-making power (Fraser, 1995) had instinctively emerged. The following descriptions illustrate what eventuated from this spontaneous partnership between university and school staff.

Lecturer's perspective

The 20 students were currently working in this particular school on a regular basis for their first level professional practice course and other curriculum modules. They had already taught groups of children on the topics of *self-symbol* and *using a story as a motivator* for the art curriculum module and were therefore familiar with the junior school environment and the children. This was considered to be advantageous for what was being planned for them to do in terms of the *teaching of an art process* through the butterflies and moths unit. In the meantime a visit to the museum for the student teachers was arranged. This was planned to coincide with the module component *development of art knowledge and skill* which covered the art elements of colour, size, shape, line and texture. This visit was intended to incorporate two objectives. One was to meet with and learn about the role of the museum education officer and how useful this resource person could be to teachers. The other was to view the exhibition and complete pencil observational drawings of the butterflies and moths, as well as reflective descriptions of the experience for their personal art journals.

Most of the student teachers in the class were unaware of the resources and facilities that the museum offered and were impressed with the education officer who outlined a range of learning activities she would share with the Normal School children during their future visit. They were also impressed with the magnificent colours, shapes and range of the butterflies and moths in the exhibition. The oral discussions among the students generated by the display were as satisfying to witness as their art works. Subsequent to the visit to the museum, the students' pencil drawings were developed into card relief blocks for the printing process. Cutting and pasting all the intricate and delicate pieces of cardboard needed for detail and texture can be time-consuming and tedious, but once the students eventually reached the actual printing part, there was as much excitement generated by the prints peeling off the relief blocks as I have ever seen with a classroom full of children going through the same process! In the discussion of how to actually manage and orchestrate such a process with a classroom of children, some useful ideas surfaced. However, many of the students remained apprehensive about the practical aspects. They seemed to generally consider it a process they would feel happier trying with older, rather than younger children.

The Normal School staff agreed to cover observational drawing of the butterflies and moths with the children during the museum visit. The next day, during their time tabled art curriculum module class time, the student teachers would then follow up the children's museum visit with an art morning at the school. The main activity was to replicate with the junior school children, the *observational drawing into print making* process they had themselves been exposed to a month earlier. In the meantime they had completed small group teaching sessions on observational drawing with middle school children, as well as covered other activities related to the *sources of motivation* aspect of the module. As part of the latter, they had watched videos showing teachers guiding children through art activities and analysed the role to the teacher through the stages of the processes with different aged children. The art morning was the penultimate session for the module. The main challenge was for the students to consider and plan the activity themselves, utilising all their previous experiences and learning in the course so that the morning was a worthwhile encounter for both themselves and the children.

It was twenty very nervous student teachers who arrived at the school for the art morning armed with equipment, plans and tentative courage. They had sorted themselves into two teams of ten students and each team was to take one class. It was the responsibility of the team to organise their own system for the morning and each team had decided on a different approach. One team had taken the safe option that they already knew worked, and decided to divide the children up into small groups so that each student teacher took an allocated group of three children through the entire process from start to finish. The other team had opted to practise what it would be like to teach a whole class at once and had allocated themselves different roles for the printing part of the process. As with the first team, this second team intended to start with small groups of children at the beginning of the session to discuss the museum visit, share their own reliefs and prints created during the module workshop, and then explain what the children were about to do. Once relief blocks were completed and trial crayon rubbings made, an 'assembly line' would then activate so that one group of children could listen to a story read by a student while other groups rotated through the monoprint and multicolour print stages with the other students. Establishing rules and routines and managing orderly 'turns' were objectives this team wanted to attempt alongside the art processes.

The classroom teachers and I planned to 'hover' and write brief notes of observations in order to give the teams feedback at the end of their session. A habitual photographer, I also had my camera ready to record the morning as a set of photos for future teaching purposes. As well, I hoped to catch some 'gem-shots of children in action' for my collection. Later the school was presented with a set of the photographs taken as a token of thanks for cooperation and support with the art module.

The morning's activities are best described through the reflections of one of the students. From a professional perspective though, it was interesting to observe the two different approaches to managing a class and to later read the students' recordings of their perception of the morning. Predictably, some problems arose at various stages of the activities, but the students managed to solve them themselves which was a valuable part of their learning. One of the main things that struck me was how intently the children engaged with the tasks and how motivated they were to develop one art medium into another. I attributed this to the continuity factor of the topic and that the art morning linked directly to the current classroom topic and followed on from the museum visit while it was still fresh in the minds of the children.

With best intentions student teachers sometimes fail to match carefully prepared activities to children's interests and needs (Fraser, 1994) but this was not an issue on this occasion. I noted how tired the children were by lunch time but their thrill with the final products that had come out of the morning seemed to compensate for this. It was evident that the classroom teachers had enjoyed working collaboratively with the students during the unit and how appreciative they were too of the resulting art works. It was also obvious how exhausted, yet 'victorious', the student teachers felt with their effort and achievements at the end of a taxing but satisfying art morning!

An integral part of the art curriculum module is that the students are encouraged to keep a record of all the work they complete during the course in an A3 sketch book. This journal though, is not only a diary and log of art works but also dialogue of how the cornerstone of professional growth in contemporary educational thinking (Canning, 1991; Holly and McLoughlin, 1989). To motivate the students to be reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983), time is allocated at the end of each workshop for in depth consideration of what has been gained and understood from the module experiences. The students record these thoughts and ideas alongside their practical examples. The quality of these reflections can indicate the progress and development of the student towards the aims of the module, especially attitudinal change. Some reflections from the journal of one of the student participants, as she progressed through the first semester art curriculum module are recorded below. The notes demonstrate the personal growth and confidence gained during the course and from the experience of the integrated unit, mentioned earlier. According to the lecturer who read through all the journals, the views of this student teacher can be considered to be representative of the views of most of the students who were in this particular art curriculum module class.

Student teacher's perspective ***At the Beginning of the Module***

Initial statement at the start of the course: My art experience is very brief. I

took 3rd form art which I enjoyed but was never any good at drawing, painting etc. I enjoyed viewing art both inside and outside galleries but wish I was a bit more skilled when it comes to the practical side. I hope this course will improve my ability.

6 March: Experimented with self symbol. Feel I have already gained some valuable knowledge of how to teach art, in this the first lesson. It gave me reassurance when the comment was made "You don't have to be good at art in order to be able to teach it", for as you can see from my self symbol, I am not the best artist in the world. Without wanting to 'sound like a big head' I think I would be able to teach this particular lesson of art and know the correct procedures to follow in order to get the best from the children.

8 March: Lecture on children's art development. I never realised how vital the various stages of a child's art development were and how they reflect the child as an individual. The Experience>Concept>Symbol theory explains many aspects of children's art that before today were not clear to me. I am starting to change my thinking towards art. Before I thought it was just a fill-in time in the classroom; now I believe differently, that it is an important curriculum area.

A Month Later

3 April: Viewed a video about the elements of art and experimented with the element of colour using pastels. The information I learnt today reminds me what I was taught about art many years ago. However, viewed from a teacher's perspective, the elements of art seem a lot more important now than when I was a little third former. I realise they are the basis for what we draw. Really enjoyed using the different medium of pastels and felt like a child with a new toy, exploring all the different aspects of the pastels. Relating my experience to children I can see it is important to vary not only what they draw, but also what they draw with. Like anything after a while, one set way can become boring even at the best times.

5 April Experimented with the element of line with pencils and felts from a worksheet giving written directions. Up until now I never realised the importance of giving verbal/visual instructions as opposed to working off written instructions. The latter is very hard, which of course is what the lecturer wanted us to discover. Also I never appreciated how much patience is required when drawing. Drawing various line patterns, I found myself losing concentration and thus the desired effect was lost.

10 April Today's visit to the museum surpassed all expectations I had. To begin with I had no idea of the vast resources and opportunities the museum has to offer

children and their teachers. The service they offer is fantastic and it is wonderful to see it is free to students. The butterfly and moth display proved not only an excellent method of drawing what you see (observational drawing) and later having to colour from how you described it, but more importantly, it was *most* interesting. I could have stayed for hours just looking at the butterflies and moths themselves and spent just as long again drawing what I saw. This kind of trip will definitely be included in my class schedule when one day I have a class of my own.

Two Months Later

1 May: Am enjoying this course even more the further we progress into the semester. The observational drawing techniques we learnt today give me yet more ideas to work with when I plan my teaching unit. The example of observing and drawing a glove in detail made me realise how patient you need to be when doing an observational drawing and I need to remember this, as children do not have as long a concentration span as adults and therefore I cannot expect them to spend hours on an observation

17 May: Saw a video on directing children's observation which appeared to be useful for the upcoming observational *drawing into print making* unit, which is in its initial stages at the moment. The work in preparation for the print relief from our museum observational drawings was interesting and I can't wait to learn more about the printing process.

22 May: I have to admit, to begin with I was a bit confused as to what was required when cutting out my butterfly picture to begin the print making process. I had to make sure I progressed slowly at the start as I did not want to make a mistake and ruin the entire print. Once I understood what I was doing and the effect I wanted to achieve I relaxed. I enjoyed cutting out the shape and details, and building up the two different relief block types and seeing them slowly take shape. I found there was a lot of peer teaching involved in this activity, which I also enjoyed as it made the whole process more interesting and helped me understand what I was doing better. I was pleased with the way the relief block turned out as well as the crayon rubbings taken off the reliefs. I am looking forward to doing the 'real' thing on Wednesday with ink.

24 May: This was a most enjoyable lesson and it was great using the ink to produce actual prints off my butterfly design. I liked the way my monoprints turned out and was happy with the prints made up of two colours, although was slightly disappointed that the second colour that I put on top of the darker colour did not stand out as much as I would have liked it to. I need to think about the colours more carefully. The whole print making experience was thoroughly enjoyable, fun and interesting. As

we finished our prints, we (finally!) went back to the three figure drawings. What I had drawn seems like a very long time ago (11 May!). It took me a while to decide on how I should position my three figures, but at the moment I am still not quite sure how I will design my background to suit the positioning I have come up with. I now realise that it is not necessary to complete an art work in one go and that it can be revisited several times. One thing I do know is that I am looking forward to using dye to colour the background picture.

At the End of the Module

7 June: Teaching print making to a whole class of junior children. I now have great admiration for the associate teacher of this new entrant class - and all new entrant teachers! I definitely think they do not gain enough recognition for all the work they do. The discussion about the museum visit went well and the children were eager to share their experiences and their observational drawings. They were most interested in my drawings too. I found the teaching experience extremely demanding when it came to the printing part and it was like being on a production line, churning out kids and prints. Because of this I felt I did not give enough personal attention to the children. I gave positive feedback and encouragement when I was working one-to-one with my group but later when I helped other children I found myself not doing this so well. There wasn't a problem with behaviour or motivation at all but there were some difficulties during parts of the process over the morning which we hadn't anticipated.

When the children in my group were transferring their observational drawings to cardboard, the paper tended to slip about. There were similar problems when they were taking a crayon rubbing, so I'd use sellotape to hold the paper in place in future. One of the children concentrated hard to get the different coloured inks in the appropriate places and he wasn't very happy when he 'went over the lines'. I reassured him that it made the picture even more special when he did go over the lines. Another child tended to give up very easily and I realise now I did her a disservice by taking the easy option of cutting out bits to help her. I should have encouraged her to do it herself as helping her out just reinforced her lack of persistence. I rewarded her 'giving up' behaviour! The other child in my group worked very quietly and independently but occasionally I needed to intervene, such as when he got carried away with the PVA glue. He really thought carefully about his colours for the multicoloured print and his prints came out well.

While it was demanding during the whole class printing session, it was also most rewarding. It gave me great satisfaction when I saw children looking at their work hanging up to dry and pointing out all the things they liked about them. I think it was great and probably vital that all the student teachers in the room worked together as a team. It seemed to work fine when one read to the class while the rest set up the

classroom or helped the children print. I still found we had a lot of wasted time which could have been eliminated if we had been organised with activities for the children to carry on with, like in the work period with the three figure pictures to complete. However, the lesson came together better than what I had expected and I ended up with no ink on my clothes which was a bonus. The class teacher seemed to be very happy with what we had achieved and how we went about it and gave us some positive feedback.

Metamorphosis

8 June: I have enjoyed this module the most out of all the curriculum areas I have studied this semester. To begin with I was not confident in art and the thought of having to take this course scared me a little. My view towards art has changed from what it used to be. I now believe having a go and attempting to make an art work is the most important aspect of the subject. Whether the finished product is wonderful or not does not really concern me now. Before I was too worried about what everybody else thought of my art work but now I am pleased with my drawings etc if I know I have put all the effort into the piece that I am able to. I hope to be able to develop this type of atmosphere in my own classroom in the future, to avoid having children not wanting to draw or not liking art because of the fear of what others say about their efforts. I have gained some valuable ideas for art objectives and practical teaching from this module which you will see me using and enjoying when I go out on teaching practice at the end of the year as well as in the future when I have my own class.

Normal school teacher's perspective

"Advantages, advantages, advantages!" was the enthusiastic response of the teacher of the new entrant class described above, who also was the senior teacher assigned as art curriculum leader at the Normal School. One of the most obvious advantages was the children having access to the process of print making itself, which a lot of teachers tend to avoid because of its complexity. The manner in which the student teachers had organised themselves to work with groups had, she felt, been beneficial to the children. Smaller groups than a classroom teacher could operate on his/her own, ensured the children had a successful print making experience. This was something, she suggested, that did not always occur when just one person was taking the whole class.

The way the two teams of student teachers had been well planned had impressed her an while she accepted that in the future as busy teachers, they may not always be so thoroughly prepared, it was important for them at this stage in order to learn the advantages that came with being well organised. One of the useful qualities of print making for young children, she felt, lay in the 'reproductive' aspect of the process.

Being able to produce more than one copy of a print meant both the children and the student teachers could come out of the activity feeling satisfied. The children had copies to take home and for the classroom display, while the student teachers had copies for their journal. Having an opportunity to share the reflections of the student described earlier, through her art journal, had helped the teacher appreciate the extent of the learning that had actually taken place. It was evident that the children and the student teachers had gained enormously from the unit.

She was also enthusiastic about the possibilities the print making lessons had given the classroom teachers to delegate the role of teacher to others, so that they themselves could gain space to stand back and observe for half a day. She said that it provided an ideal opportunity for the teachers to assess aspects of the children's learning behaviour and art skills (Faire, 1994), which they did not often get the chance to do in busy classrooms. It also allowed the teachers time to talk with the children on a different level and in a different role so that many insights into individual personalities and skill abilities had been recognised for the first time. Having the set of photographs was an extra bonus that had been well received and extensively utilised for language experience activities.

It had been, she felt, an "amazing set of lessons", not only for providing skills the children could learn through the activities, but also for giving them the challenge to try out difficult things. Integrating the art curriculum tasks with the topic being studied in the classroom provided an 'extra' dimension. Having domain knowledge of the topic provides children with a scaffold to assist them with absorbing the new activity in a meaningful way. This helps to reinforce their understanding. The interest and enthusiasm generated by the tasks had been high, and this would have not only made the teaching easier for the student teachers, but also supported the children's learning. The interaction between the children, and between student teachers and children, had been a very positive. The children had obviously, she believed, been stimulated and extended by the interactive group work involved.

From the school's perspective, one of the key advantages and one that was most appreciated, was that the art curriculum work had *not* just been a 'one-off' but a whole unit. Most importantly, it was directly related to what was going on in classrooms. In her view, schools (where student teachers practise curriculum lessons) really value the university making an effort to tie in lessons to topics staff have already planned. In this case, the art curriculum practice activity of *observational drawing into print making* had been successfully integrated into the topic of butterflies and moths planned as a science unit for the whole junior school. It would be good, she suggested, if curriculum lecturers would consistently make the time to come out to the school and discuss intended themes and topics. It would make curriculum practice activities more interesting and exciting experiences for all concerned. It would also, she feels, give

greater purpose for all involved.

Conclusion

It would seem from the three perspectives described above, that the concept of integration and reciprocity across the needs of the school and university in a partnership model is seen as a beneficial and useful approach by all concerned. Directly linking a teacher preparation curriculum module with a unit of study that the school had previously planned, had been appreciated and valued by both participants. Due to input from both partners, lecturers and teachers, the university art curriculum module had been extended to include using the museum resource with student teachers. In turn, the school science unit had been extended to include challenging art activities for the children. It was a productive exercise that could well provide an appropriate model for future interactions between teacher preparation institutions and schools. All in all, it was a productive exercise that effectively demonstrated the *benefits of butterflies*.

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