

Action Research: How does designing visual arts instruction around competency in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind from Lois Hetland's *Studio Thinking* framework affect the engagement and academic achievement of students?

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Action Research Brief

As I begin my career as a visual arts educator, I am taking steps to involve myself with art education advocacy initiatives at the state and national level through engagement with the Illinois Art Education Association (IAEA) and other like-minded organizations. In particular, I have joined the IAEA Advocacy Task Force in an effort to develop a biannual research-based publication which functions to summarize recent, relevant research that makes a case for why visual arts education is important. I have suggested to team members that it may be particularly interesting to frame our investigation this time around with the “Eight Studio Habits of Mind” from Lois Hetland’s *Studio Thinking*. The eight studio habits of mind are behaviors and ways of thinking that are learned through participation in visual arts. They are: *develop craft; engage and persist; envision; express; observe; reflect; stretch and explore; and understand art worlds* (Hetland, Sheridan, Veenema, & Winner, 2013). My wanderings on this topic have led me to develop the following action research investigation: How does designing visual arts instruction around competency in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind from Lois Hetland’s *Studio Thinking* framework affect the engagement and academic achievement of students? To answer this, I will engage in answering two sub-questions: how does student engagement with the Eight Studio Habits of Mind affect their achievement in the visual arts and other disciplines, and, how does framing instruction with the Eight Studio Habits of Mind allow students to participate in self-evaluation such that they are highly engaged and reflective about their learning in the visual arts and other disciplines.

Guiding Question

How does designing visual arts instruction around competency in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind from Lois Hetland's *Studio Thinking* framework affect the engagement and academic achievement of students?

Sub-questions

1. How does student engagement with the Eight Studio Habits of Mind affect student achievement in the visual arts and other disciplines?

Data Collection Tools for Sub-question 1:

- Questionnaires from other teachers on students' abilities with regard to the Eight Studio Habits of Mind and how these contribute to their success in class
- Numerical student grades from other disciplines at beginning of year (BOY), middle of year (MOY), and end of year (EOY) to see how they increase as students progress through the Eight Studio Habits of Mind
- Student work samples: the same observational drawing exercise completed at BOY, MOY, EOY in an effort to show increased technical competency over time

2. How does framing instruction with the Eight Studio Habits of Mind allow students to participate in self-evaluation such that they are highly engaged and reflective about their learning in the visual arts and other disciplines?

Data Collection Tools for Sub-question 2:

- Student self-evaluations from art class at BOY, MOY, EOY, in which students rank strengths and weaknesses regarding each of the Eight Studio Habits of Mind and comments as to why they believe they deserve each score
- Week-long behavior checklist indicating how often students participate in targeted behaviors relevant to the Eight Studio Habits of Mind at BOY, MOY, and EOY in art and other disciplines (teacher checks off whether or not the student engages in the behavior each day). This would also involve compiling numerical data on a chart to show the behavior of all students in a class for one week at each reporting point.
- Questionnaires from other teachers on student engagement at BOY, MOY, EOY

Literature Review

For many years, arts advocates, teachers, parents, and even politicians have made a case for the arts by claiming “arts make you smarter” (Hetland & Winner, 2008). That is, students who participate in arts classes (e.g. visual arts, music, dance, drama) score higher on standardized tests and achieve higher in school than their non-arts-educated peers. While this notion is not completely unfounded, it is important to realize in this instance that “correlation isn’t causation” (Hetland & Winner, 2008).

Lois Hetland is an art professor and well-known researcher in the field of art education. She argues that, “by continuing to focus on the arts’ dubious links to improved test scores, arts advocates are losing...a real grasp of what arts bring to education.” Hetland is responsible in part for developing the Studio Thinking framework for visual arts education. One of two parts of this framework is the Eight Studio Habits of Mind, which are specific behaviors and ways of thinking that are learned through participation in visual arts. They are: *develop craft; engage and persist; envision; express; observe; reflect; stretch and explore; and understand art worlds* (Hetland, Sheridan, Veenema, & Winner, 2013). These eight habits of mind can provide evidentiary support that art education equips students with skills and competencies they need to be successful not only in school, but in the ever-evolving professional world that awaits them upon graduation.

While students in art classes learn specific techniques in an effort to *develop craft*, they also engage in important behaviors and learning strategies that other disciplines do not necessarily teach. Take, for example, the ability to *observe* carefully. Seeing is more complicated than one might initially think. When we look at something, our perception of that thing is framed by our expectations and preconceived notions about that thing. Therefore we rarely see things

exactly as they are. For instance, when beginning artists set out to draw the human figure, they often struggle with proportion of the face and other body parts. As Hetland and Winner explain, “the power of our expectation explains why beginners draw eyes too high [on the head] and hands too small” (2008). However, practice in the visual arts teaches students to see things around them accurately and directly. Furthermore, Hetland and Winner note “seeing clearly by looking past one’s preconceptions is central to a variety of professions, from medicine to law” (2008). I agree with Hetland that the tendencies that the art teach are what equip students to be successful in their future lives, arguably more than solely possessing knowledge on any particular subject.

Overall, research on the subject seems to defend the idea that learning through the arts will prove key in providing today’s students with the tools and abilities they need to unlock the ideas of the future. In examining the benefits of art education, researcher and art educator Theresa Alo states, “arts education contributes skills that students need to be successful in a diverse world” (2014). As the landscape of the professional world and the opportunities available to the next generation of workers changes with each new technological advancement, skills that the arts teach become ever more important. Alo is not the only one who believes that art education is a means to equip students with skills they will need in the future; President Barack Obama’s Committee on Arts and the Humanities reports their “conviction that arts education provides a critical benefit to the private sector” by developing students into creative, collaborative, and resilient thinkers and problem solvers. The committee affirms that providing all students with access to arts education will equip them with “skills they will need in the jobs of tomorrow” (President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities [PCAH], 2011).

We can begin to investigate how students use the Eight Studio Habits of Mind as they

explore disciplines other than the visual arts by looking at arts integrated curriculum. In my own experience and in a great deal of research, there is evidence that teaching through and with the arts and using arts integration to encourage cross-curricular connections has the ability to benefit students in very tangible ways, including higher standardized tests scores, increased motivation, and more positive attitudes toward school (Robinson, 2013). It is interesting then, to consider how the benefits of arts integration and the focus on development of the Eight Studio Habits of Mind might couple to contribute to notably exceptional levels of engagement and achievement for students.

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities mentions that the 19 schools where the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) operated using a model of arts integration showed consistently higher average scores on math and reading tests than other schools in the district. The same was true in a study of a North Carolina charter school network where professional development focused on arts integration through the lens of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. In general, statistics point to arts integration raising test scores, teacher and student morale, and even attendance (PCAH, 2011). Certainly students participating in an arts integrated curriculum are likely to engage in the Eight Studio Habits of mind as they make their own connections between disciplines and their own personal contexts.

For example, at Horace Greeley Elementary School in Chicago, students completed an art project that supported curricular objectives in social science relating to Native American culture. Each student created a "Kachina doll with two animals that represented their inner and outer selves" (PCAH, 2011). Students were fully engaged with the history of the culture but also with *developing craft* artistically, as they *reflected* on how their inner and outer selves differed and *envisioned* which animals would allow them to represent these qualities of themselves. As social

science and visual arts intertwined, students were given the opportunity to interact with both curriculums in a meaningful way through participation in the studio habits.

Engaging in art-making teaches students ways of thinking and dispositions that they would be unlikely to learn through other disciplines, such as how to learn from and value making mistakes. John Crowe, a professor at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, allows his students to *stretch and explore* by assigning them the task of making “50 visual art mistakes.” After students loosen up and begin to play and experiment to complete this task, Professor Crowe changes things up, and requests that students “elevate one of these mistakes to the level of art” (Hetland, 2013). As students consider how their errors can become opportunities, they are *engaging and persisting* in spite of their mistakes, *envisioning* what can come of their mistakes, and *reflecting* on what they learned from their mistakes.

In acquiring these Eight Studio Habits of Mind, students are making the most of their educational opportunity by not only acquiring knowledge, but also learning what to do with it. We have learned from the likes of Howard Gardner that “for students to develop their mental capacities and realize their fullest potential, they need to be exposed to not only many kinds of knowledge, but also to many ways of knowing and expressing their thoughts” (Alo, 2014). Additionally, neuroscience research is revealing an impressive impact of arts instruction on students’ cognitive, creative, social, and emotional development (Alo, 2014). Since participation in the arts has many clear benefits, it is beneficial to establish what exactly it is about learning through the arts that makes students so engaged and academically high-achieving. I believe, along with many others, that it is the opportunity to cycle through the non-hierarchical studio habits of mind and learn ways of thinking and dispositions vital to visual arts, which contributes to student success not only in the visual arts classroom, but in all academic endeavors.

Data Analysis

According to my plan, research on this topic would be conducted over the span of one academic year. Data from each of the collection tools would be evaluated at three points during the year: the beginning of the year (BOY), middle of the year (MOY), and end of the year (EOY). The data collected will be sourced from student self-evaluation and feedback, numerical grades, and teachers from multiple disciplines. The table below shows how and when data will be collected using three unique data collection tools for each of two sub-questions.

Guiding Question: How does designing visual arts instruction around competency in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind from Lois Hetland's <i>Studio Thinking</i> framework affect the engagement and academic achievement of students?				
Research Sub-questions	Timeline	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
Sub-question #1: How does student engagement with the Eight Studio Habits of Mind affect student achievement in the visual arts and other disciplines?	BOY	Questionnaires from other teachers on students' abilities with regard to the Eight Studio Habits of Mind and how these contribute to their success in class (Appendix A)	Numerical student grades from other disciplines to see how they increase as students progress through the Eight Studio Habits of Mind	Student work samples: the same observational drawing exercise completed in an effort to show increased technical competency over time
	MOY			
	EOY			
Sub-question #2: How does framing instruction with the Eight Studio Habits of Mind allow students to participate in self-evaluation such that they are highly engaged and reflective about their learning in the visual arts and other disciplines?	BOY	Student self-evaluations from art class where they rank strengths and weaknesses regarding each habit and give feedback as to why they believe they deserve each score (Appendix B)	Week-long behavior checklist indicating how often students participate in targeted behaviors relevant to the Eight Studio Habits of Mind in art and other disciplines (Appendix C)	Questionnaires from other teachers on student engagement (Appendix D)
	MOY			
	EOY			

Anticipated Findings

By investigating the question "How does designing visual arts instruction around competency in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind from Lois Hetland's Studio Thinking framework affect the engagement and academic achievement of students?" I anticipate that I will find:

- Quantitative data that points to increased student achievement in the visual arts and other disciplines through participation in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind
- Qualitative data that points to increased student engagement and confidence as they cycle through and achieve competency in the Eight Studio Habits throughout the course of the academic year

Obstacles and Opportunities

One obstacle that I may encounter in conducting this research would be a lack of teacher or student investment or participation in important data collection activities. Another might be a lack of support from administration in conducting the research. I believe my greatest opportunity in reviewing my research plans would be conducting research using a longer timeline (for example, four academic years following a group of high school freshmen). It would be interesting to see how the data is strengthened or weakened over time.

Appendix A

Teacher Questionnaire: Eight Studio Habits of Mind and Student Achievement

Teacher Name: _____

Subject Taught: _____

Homeroom Number of Students Being Evaluated: _____

Date of evaluation (circle one): BOY MOY EOY

1. Do you find that in your class, students regularly participate in the following behaviors: *develop craft; engage and persist; envision; express; observe; reflect; stretch and explore; and understand art worlds?*

Provide specific examples.

2. Do you believe that student participation in the above behaviors contributes to their ability to be successful in your class? If yes, how so? If students are not presently participating in these behaviors, do you believe they would be more successful in your class if they did?

3. Have you noticed student growth with regard to these behaviors since the last time you completed this questionnaire? Provide specific examples.

Appendix B

Behavior Checklist on Student Participation in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind

Student Name: _____

Teacher Name: _____

Date of evaluation (circle one): BOY MOY EOY

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Comments: How did the student participate in this studio habit of mind this week?
	Check box for each day student participated in the indicated habit					
Develop Craft						
Engage and Persist						
Envision						
Express						
Observe						
Reflect						
Stretch and Explore						
Understand Art Worlds						

Appendix C

Student Self-Evaluation on Competency in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind

Student Name: _____

Homeroom: _____ Date: _____

5 = Extremely Competent – I totally understand what it means to practice this habit and I always do

4 = Very Competent – I feel I know how to engage in this habit and I almost always do

3 = Competent – I feel I am “okay” at engaging in this studio habit in the art room

2 = Somewhat Competent – I could definitely improve in understanding and practicing this habit, but I try

1 = Minimally or Not Competent – I feel like I never engage in this habit or don’t know how to

	5	4	3	2	1	Comments: Why did you give yourself that score?
Check one box indicating your score						
Develop Craft						
Engage and Persist						
Envision						
Express						
Observe						
Reflect						
Stretch and Explore						
Understand Art Worlds						

Appendix D

Teacher Questionnaire: Eight Studio Habits of Mind and Student Engagement

Teacher Name: _____

Subject Taught: _____

Homeroom Number of Students Being Evaluated: _____

Date of evaluation (circle one): BOY MOY EOY

1. How would you describe the level of student engagement in your class at present? Provide specific examples.

2. Do you believe that student participation in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind (*develop craft; engage and persist; envision; express; observe; reflect; stretch and explore; and understand art worlds*) contributes to their ability to remain engaged during your class?

3. How do you find that students remain engaged in your class by way of participation in the Eight Studio Habits of Mind? Provide specific examples.

References

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