Honoring and Utilizing the Preoperational Thinkers' Artistic Processes in Art Education

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HONORING AND UTILIZING
THE PREOPERATIONAL THINKERS’ ARTISTIC PROCESSES
IN ART EDUCATION

By
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A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
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ABSTRACT

The general childhood cognitive developmental stage that starts when children are about two years of age and lasts until they are around seven years old is most commonly referred to as the preoperational stage, or the pre-schematic stage when used in reference to artistic development. During the preoperational stage of development, children possess an uncanny and prolific ability to transcend communication barriers through a multitude of artistic media and processes.

The topic of preoperational learners’ thought processes and how this relates to their art is examined in this thesis from philosophical and developmental standpoints. The authentic nature of young children’s thinking and artmaking is verified through an examination of selected literature. Another core aspect of this thesis is the development and presentation of a sample art lesson plan for preoperational learners. This lesson was taught as part of the thesis research, and a commentary is provided that reflects on both teaching the lesson and the resulting artwork.

In this thesis, I suggest that preoperational children learn and communicate in the art room in a way that is natural, revelatory, and unfortunately quite ephemeral. I investigate ways to connect with children’s youthful thought processes in elementary art instruction and the ways others have done it in the past, present, and hopefully in a more lasting way in the future. The review of literature and the implemented and analyzed
curriculum project completed for this thesis substantiate that preoperational learners’ thought processes should be further honored and utilized in elementary art education.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As a youngster, my family had a junk-drawer in our pantry. There were general art supplies like crayons, markers, glue, and paper, but the drawer also contained an odd and exciting assortment of ever-changing items as well. Sometimes there was a box of rubber bands or a handful of bendy straws, and other times it might be paper clips and my mom’s pocket change. Whatever the items were, my older brother and I would find ourselves drawing, coloring, or creating mystery machines (sculptures) with them during our time on the hard but scarred maple floor. While constructing these assemblages our imaginations were in overdrive. It has been decades since our last junk-drawer excursion, but I still distinctly remember a popsicle-stick flying machine powered by a rubber band that received its power via a paper-clip connected to a (dead) battery. There were no time constraints or rules governing the use of any items found in the junk-drawer. Oftentimes my brother would lose interest before me, but I could entertain myself for hours with the eclectic mix of stuff found in that old drawer.

Even many years later at the University of Rhode Island, where I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts in two dimensional studies in 1992, I used to draw, paint, rip, tear, and create all through the night down at the old cow barn studio, immersed in the act of creating. As a matter of fact, I stopped wearing my watch during those years because I would see it on my wrist and become distracted by the late hour. For then, instead of
enjoying my studio time I began to focus on my responsibilities for the quickly approaching day ahead.

Throughout my life the power of artistic creativity has taken hold of me, as it does with most of the young children that I now encounter as an art teacher in my elementary school art room. I am fortunate enough to still be playing in my junk drawer, only now it has been expanded to the size of a classroom, and I have been taking on a lot of new members in the creativity class over the past six years of my teaching.

As I began the process of developing ideas for my thesis project, I knew it should revolve around things that I have found to be constants in my life both personally and professionally. I have always enjoyed art and so do the young children that I have the honor of teaching in the Middletown, Rhode Island school district. First, I looked at why I enjoy art and I found myself gravitating toward the psychological and subconscious aspects of art making. The initial resources I explored that canvassed both kids’ art and psychology emphasized communication and rehabilitation in a pathological sense, which I maintain an interest in but it seemed too narrow of an approach. I did not want my thesis ideas to be thought of in the sole context of children with mental illness, sickness, or disease because I am concerned with education and creativity in regard to all children. So I approached my thesis project from a professional art education perspective and the question became: why do young children love art so much? Then I broadened the scope and asked: why do some people love art and others have no interest, or simply lose interest? I believe that children do not gravitate toward art for the purpose of building specific skills or mastering certain processes but for the freedoms it grants us. Using our bodies to communicate what our mind is thinking is the point and the joy.
So as I redirected my research efforts, the purpose of this thesis slowly and gently unfolded before me. I wanted to explore why and how Piaget’s concept of the preoperational learner (Piaget & Inhelder, 1958) could help me investigate the boundless creativity and joy in the visual arts that I see on a daily basis. Why do preoperational children (ages 2-7) uniquely approach and energetically communicate their ideas with artistic processes in the preoperational stage? How can young children with newly emerging motor-skill capacities effectively manipulate media, most of which they have little or no previous knowledge of, into a meaningful image or structure? One will not usually be overwhelmed by the technical expertise of the preoperational artist, but the overall ingenuity and creativity that emerges from their efforts is often quite staggering.

As children progress to the stage of development that Piaget & Inhelder, (1958) calls concrete operation (ages 7-10), their ideas and consequently their art becomes more inhibited. The possible causes for children’s increased inhibitions is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is explored in this thesis is the awesome creative abilities of preoperational learners. As children move into the next stage of cognitive development, it is as if a switch gets slowly flipped during children’s development, whereby what was once an honest search for meaningful and creative imagery often becomes rote repetition and imitative artmaking. The focus of this thesis is to become engaged in analyzing preoperational learners’ amazing ability to create original art and to promote honoring this more in elementary art education. To do this, one needs to explore some key art education literature philosophies and ideas from past and present. In addition to these sources, one must also investigate contemporary art education curriculum resources. A crucial aspect of this investigation also calls for a comprehensive look at preoperational
learners’ actual artwork. To accomplish this we will be looking at some of the beautiful images that my students created from an art lesson plan that I developed, implemented, and analyzed specifically for this thesis.

A content overview of this thesis begins with Chapter 2, which contains information that helps one gain a better understanding of our human thought processes and how these thought processes develop through individual experiences and time. The primary focus is on how preoperational learners structure their thought processes and how this relates to their art. This is examined from philosophical and developmental standpoints. The authentic nature of young children’s thinking and artmaking is verified through an examination of selected literature in this chapter.

Chapter 3 offers a review of elementary art education curriculum resources and how the information they contain can be used to reinforce preoperational learners’ artistic strengths. The resources examined offer philosophical, developmental, and organizational advice as it relates to individual artwork and overall classroom management. The challenge of creating an atmosphere for young artists to think and create without overwhelming some and under stimulating others is pondered and discussed.

Chapter 4 presents a lesson plan I developed based on many of the concepts and issues discussed in this thesis. While emphasizing and providing an open-ended learning experience for students, this art lesson plan is also linked to the National Visual Arts Standards. The second part of the chapter includes my commentary on the students’ artwork resulting from my teaching this lesson. It is an analysis that is meant to honor the students and their art and provide insights for my own and other art educators’ efforts.
in teaching art to children. Appendix A contains the illustrations of student artwork that corresponds to the commentary.

Chapter 5 offers some closing observations. As a result of doing this thesis project, I have further realized the vital role that the students’ art and ideas should play in creating an art curriculum. In turn, it is mandatory that I continue to ask how I can adapt the curriculum to better serve the students’ needs. This is indeed a challenge for all art educators. I hope that by investigating preoperational thinkers’ art, one can begin to understand in a more general way why art is so very important as a way of thinking, seeing, and communicating in our world.
CHAPTER 2
THE STRUCTURING OF OUR THOUGHT PROCESSES:
PREOPERATIONAL LEARNING AND COMMUNICATING
THROUGH THE VISUAL ARTS

Young children think differently from adolescents or adults and their approach to artmaking differs greatly from older children and adults. In this thesis I explore aspects of how and why children in the preoperational stage of development demonstrate authentic art experiences and how we can all, especially art educators, learn from preoperational thinkers' artistic processes. There are copious amounts of literature on this subject, but I have tried to distill the most pertinent information for the purposes of this study. This chapter presents a brief selection of the young child’s thinking and approaches to artmaking.

According to Jean Piaget’s research in the field of cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1958), his concept of the preoperational stage occurs in children who are approximately two to seven years old. This is the stage of development when children begin to understand and use symbols in their thought processes. In effect, they can begin to pretend, because they are making connections between real or observed objects and the words or images that represent them. During the preoperational stage children are also egocentric. Because children are self-centered, with a burgeoning ability to symbolize, they create a magical world around themselves. This world is the preoperational child’s
reality. In this chapter, I explore the concept of children’s learning and development as it relates to their artmaking and the inherent thought processes in the preoperational child.

We are social beings and the need to transcend solipsism through all forms of communication is a key starting point. First we communicate through crying, smiling, baby-talk, errant sensorimotor markings, and then finally we arrive at the preoperational stage of thinking at around the second year of life (Piaget & Inhelder, 1958). The ability to use language and mark making to symbolize the thoughts that occur begins a lifetime of communication efforts. This is a launching point into a world of learning. As Jean Piaget puts it, “The external functions of intelligence consists in understanding and inventing in other words in building up structures by structuring reality” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1963 p. 27). This is what we do then from the preoperational stage forward we “structure our reality.”

A definitive source on how we do this as it relates to artmaking is by Rudolf Arnheim (1967), *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, which balances scientific justification with the human nature of art. Arnheim’s groundbreaking research in this field is echoed by many of the resources used in this thesis including my own.

Another foundational source that must be considered for this thesis is Lev Vygotsky (1978) and his general concept that full cognitive development requires social interaction. Although this thesis is about individual creation and artmaking, we need to recognize that all learners, in every stage of development, are influenced and changed by their experiences within a society, culture, educational system, and classroom.
The well known book by Betty Edwards (1979), *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain: A Course in Enhancing Creativity in Artistic Confidence*, helps us to understand how our brains configure reality by contrasting the left and the right hemispheres of our brain. Edwards outlines her left-brain/right-brain idea as follows: the left-brain is verbal, logical, and symbolic -- while the right brain is global, spatial, and holistic. Edwards continues to explain her theory by stating that the left brain forms the ideas of written words and language, while the right brain unlocks our capacity beyond memory intensive operations and rigid recall. To support her point, Edwards effectively traces the origins of the left-brain bias in language back to its Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and French roots. Some examples Edwards provides from *The American College Dictionary* (1970) should suffice:

**Left-handed** 5. ambiguous or doubtful: *a left-handed compliment*. 6. clumsy or awkward. (p. 695)

**Right-handed** 3. most efficient or useful as a helper: *one’s right-hand man*. 4. resourceful. (p. 1045)

Edward’s point, which I agree with, is that our educational system and our society as a whole, while having made tremendous strides, is only facilitating the use of half our brains. Think of our current educational mandates on testing and in which subject areas the testing is concentrated. Reading, writing, and math are at the apex of the testing mandates precisely because they are subject areas that can be easily quantified through testing. However, there are other equally as important aspects of our intelligence, such as invention, imagination, and intuitiveness that reside in the right-brain and are not easily
accounted for through testing. In so being, they are not being emphasized in our left-brain influenced technological culture.

In 1930, psychologist Karl Buhler said:

By the time the child can draw more than a scribble, by age 3 or 4 years, an already well-formed body of conceptual knowledge formulated in language dominates his memory and controls his graphic work .... Drawings are graphic accounts of essentially verbal processes. As an essentially verbal education gains control, the child abandons his graphic efforts and relies almost entirely on words. Language has first spoilt drawing and then swallowed it up completely. (Edwards, 1979)

Instead of using both hemispheres of our brains to process and respond to the world around us, our educational systems are fostering the left-brain approach. As a result of having such an emphasis on left-brain thinking, in most of our society, our artistic processes and products are becoming undervalued. The artist August Rodin offers us some hope as to how to salvage the artistic thought process and its importance when he wrote: “The artist is the confidant of nature, flowers carry on dialogues with him through the graceful bending of their stems and the harmoniously tinted nuances of their blossoms. Every flower has a cordial word which nature directs toward him” (Edwards, p. 5). I like to think of the art of pre-operational children in the same way: natural, intuitive, spirited, and certainly originating in the right-brain.

On the contrary, left-brain thinking is logical and sequential which produces formatted learning, predictable outcomes, and a conformist atmosphere. As a consequence, children look to adults or educators for all of the answers instead of searching for them independently. This is an issue that George Szekely (1988) deals with in his book Encouraging Creativity in Art Lessons. According to Szekely, after a couple
of years in school, children may have the realization that the art room is one of the only places left that “…is concerned with an original response to immediate experience” (Szekely p. xiii). He also believes that “Students need to be taught to take their own ideas and observations seriously and to turn to themselves first and foremost for solutions and answers” (Szekely, p. 9). This is the condition of the preoperational thinker. I also believe that children lose their authenticity and are forced rather than nurtured through our educational systems. Education should, at times, give each child the ability to choose what is important and educationally stimulating, in an effort to bolster interest and self-confidence. To assume that young children do not have a need to express original ideas through distinctive artistic images delimits their educational experience and growth. In support of valuing children’s viewpoints, Szekely quotes the renowned art critic Clive Bell:

Do not tamper with that direct emotional reaction to things which is the genius of children. Do not destroy their sense of reality by teaching them to manipulate labels. Do not imagine that adults must be the best judges of what is good and what matters. Don’t be such an ass as to suppose that what excites uncle is more exciting than what excites Tommy. (Szekely, p. 140)

In the same sense, Szekely (1988) believes art is about explorations, possibilities, and different perspectives. While I agree with him whole-heartedly, I am also not opposed to many “traditional” learning techniques. I am searching to incorporate different ways of thinking and learning into a cohesive educational experience in my elementary level art teachings. I believe preoperational thinkers hold the key that unlocks the door behind which originality stirs. Based on my teaching experiences, I contend that preoperational thinkers do require some basic knowledge, guidance, and instruction as an accompaniment to their capacity to generate authentic ideas. For example, the fact that
the primary colors can be combined with one another in certain ways to create the secondary colors is an amazing piece of knowledge for a preoperational thinker. I believe that we need to ensure that children learn some basic art concepts without waiting for it all to happen by accident. We need to listen and watch our students’ independent explorations, but we also need to teach.

Peter London’s (1989) book *No More Second Hand Art: Awakening the Artist Within* is also concerned with rekindling, or searching out, our creative centers. This is in large part, where we all started our artistic endeavors in our preoperational stage. London examines how we became separated from our creative centers by the use of external values and standards. London’s emphasis on values brings a personal focus to my exploration; for while he looks critically at standards, he shows how our current national education agenda needs to remain keenly aware of the unique benefits of our individual artistic endeavors. London states:

Standards are always hypothetical extremes and people are not, real people will always, must always fall short of the standard. We are all imperfect versions of some external standard, some platonic absolute. We are supposed to lose. So don’t do it. (p. 56)

I believe that many children feel as though they must strap on their armor to do battle with the standards in education. However, in the artroom children in the preoperational stage aren’t thinking about the stress of standards-based grading as they create their images. They are asked to contribute, for themselves and others, in an effort to better understand, revel in, and enjoy the world. It is about taking the armor off to show people who they really are. The armor they shed frees them and allows their ideas to really shine. London asserts that in their artmaking, young children are able to:
…create imagery that honestly represents how life feels from the inside, there is a
deep sense of personal empowerment and a new degree of private certainty as a result of having finally touched down to the original bedrock of our original self.
This is the stuff of art. (p. 22)

I have never encountered a child in the preoperational stage of development that is sub-standard on the creative section of a standards-based report card and I can’t imagine a scenario where I could judge a child’s imagination/creation as sub-standard.

As London puts it:

We cannot act with integrity or be spontaneous and original when we place between ourselves and our canvas the conclusions and values of others. Right and wrong are always associated with good and bad. Good and bad always have ethical connotations: hence in judging our work (and worth) using right and wrong as our scale, we not only often come out the inept we also feel ethically deficient. (p. 57)

What kind of educator can judge the joyful and playful image making of the preoperational thinker? For example, I believe it is not an art educator’s job to willfully judge a young child’s drawing of a rainbow as deficient or wrong because it does not contain every spectrum of color, or because it is oddly shaped. Technical aspects of image making will come in time; it is more about gesture and idea in the preoperational stage.

Psychologists Dennie Wolf and Howard Gardener conducted an experiment of preoperational children in which they observed the processes in children’s image making. They made some impressive observations, one of which we’ll call the Rabbit-goes-hop-hop. “Wolf observed a 1 1/2 year-old who took the marker and hopped it around on the page, leaving a mark with each imprint…”(Winner, 1986, p. 1). The assignment was to draw a bunny, and if the teacher missed the process of the image making, the inevitable assumption would follow that the young artist was quite deficient. In reality we have a
young image-maker who is quite accomplished. I believe that we can learn from and explore many aspects of children’s image making and the processes involved in their efforts. There is no outside interference or agenda to be met within a child’s picture. Children are absorbed in their own world when they are creating images, and this is a beautiful starting point for art education.

Another excellent resource on this subject is by Nancy Smith (1997), Observation Drawing with Children: A Framework for Teachers. Smith helps to reframe a consideration of what is happening in children’s art, more specifically when they draw from observation. She writes:

Nearly a century ago (1913) Georges-Henri Luquet … as well as those that have followed him, left us an essentially romantic portrait of the child artist. Young children drew what they thought or felt, not what they saw; they portrayed an internal, not an external world. (Smith, p. ix)

This view suggests that children’s art is from the heart. Children in the preoperational stage certainly portray an internal rather than external world in their art, but I believe that we must take it a step further. What are they really doing when they create their masterpieces? Are they playing, questioning, organizing, or perhaps making a statement as they make art? In contrast there are literally outside sources at work with observation drawing. As Smith puts it, “the goal of observation drawing for young children is the development of mental and physical abilities used in the discovery and creation of meaning through drawing” (p. 14). This reinforces Betty Edward’s right-brain/left-brain epistemology. By giving children something physical and tangible to draw, a flower for instance, we are creating a situation in which children can become better at representing its physical reality. As they look more closely perhaps they also begin to recognize distinct features that help them to understand the biology and beauty
of nature. According to Smith, it will ultimately afford them an opportunity to reach a
deep level of thinking and understanding.

That being said, and for all of the advantages that observation drawing can
deliver in terms of education of our children, I have used some language here that is quite
opposed to the inherent benefits of the preoperational experience of children’s artmaking.
When I say that children will become “better” at representing and come to a “deeper”
understanding of an object through observation drawing, I am creating a hierarchy. I am
ascribing a value to their art, which is something that children’s preoperational art has the
ability to circumvent.

In my view, for all of its rewards, observation drawing creates a boundary,
because it always leads back to a visible object rather than an elusive thought. The well-
known statement by the philosopher Keats (1820), “Beauty is truth, truth beauty--that is
all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” from Ode on a Grecian Urn, contains a
tremendous caveat. Beauty is the observed physicality of an object, while truth is the
essence. Realistic representation is not the agenda of the preoperational image-maker, it
is much more about the fun of exploration. Therefore, I make the connection that
preoperational thinkers are in search of truth, not beauty, although sometimes they may
be one in the same.

Jonathan Fineberg (1997) continues this theme of truth seeking in his book The
Innocent Eye: Children’s Art and the Modern Artist. His book resonates with ideas that
begin with the all too common phrase “even a child could make that” in reference to
many modern arts “masterpieces.” Fineberg examines a variety of styles of art and
Fineberg devotes an entire chapter to the COBRA art movement, which began in 1948. COBRA is an acronym for the capitals of Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam from which the artists for this movement resided. The artists lauded the special and “irrational knowledge” that flows from early childhood and that has been examined exhaustively through automation and the surrealists. One of the founders of COBRA, Constant, said that “the child knows of no other than its spontaneous sensation of life, and feels no need to express anything else” (Fineberg, p. 184). From my experience as an elementary art teacher, I can attest that every child enjoys creating art for almost no other reason than the sheer pleasure of it.

Fineberg also presents the words of Corneille, another member of COBRA, who said “No good picture without great pleasure” (p. 184). In my own art teaching at the elementary level, I have found that when children enter the art room and prepare to make their ideas manifest, there is a visible sense of joy. After distributing materials to the children, just before they begin, the look on their faces and their posturing is most akin to what it would be as they are about to unwrap a present on their birthday. There is happy anticipation, followed by complete engrossment, with a complement of surprise and pride. Children’s art is a wellspring of beauty and truth and so the gift that is returned to me as their teacher is the pleasure of viewing their joy in art making and the resulting images. Preoperational children are especially capable of expressing themselves directly through their art.
In another section of *The Innocent Eye*, Fineberg draws a correlation between young children’s art and nature. By “nature” he is making reference to an uncivilized state of being: a naïve condition before the norms of society, in whatever time period, exhaust the purity of the spirit that we are all given at birth. Fineberg explains that the German painter Caspar David Fredrich extolled:

> The only true source of art is our heart, the language of a pure childlike spirit. A creation, not flowing from these springs, can only be mannerisms. Every time a work of art is received in consecrated hours and born in jubilant—to the artist often unknown—inner urges of the heart. (p. 2)

My belief is that authenticity is present from birth and it is only once children gain some fine-motor control that they can begin to communicate in the preoperational stage of development. It is a marvelous stage in which they can connect with the rest of humanity through their images and yet not be overridden by the ambiguities of society at large. I propose that the preoperational thinker is unique and that a better understanding of this stage of development may offer us a portal through to the realm of what some consider genius. We could also require the adult faculties of reason and knowledge as an accompaniment to the clairvoyance of a child. Charles Baudelaire wrote in the *Painter of Modern Life* that “genius is nothing more nor less than childhood regained at will -- a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood’s capacities and a power of analysis” (Fineberg, 1997, p. 5). Fineberg explains that Baudelaire believed that children were the true source of new ideas despite his acknowledgement that they hadn’t the slightest concept of what to do with all of their ideas.

Fineberg goes on to explain how in 1848 the Swiss artist and educator, Töpffer, brought some insight to which might have more importance: the idea, or technical expertise. In Töpffer’s words, “There is less difference between Michelangelo the child
scribbler and Michelangelo the immortal artist than between Michelangelo after having become an immortal artist and Michelangelo while still an apprentice” (Fineberg, p. 5). This supports my position in this thesis that the preoperational artist has an inborn and inimitable way of relating to life and that this is what we need to honor more in art education. In my view less emphasis should be placed on technical conventions and tools, whether finger-paints, pen, or stone, because these are merely the conduits of communication, which we can learn to master through practice.

Children in the preoperational stage do not rely on conventions of volume, perspective, and the like because they haven’t learned them yet. Quoting Ellen Winner (1986) from an issue of Psychology Today, she says:

Children are unconcerned with realism, their drawings are free, fanciful and inventive. Suns may be green, cars may float in the sky and complex, irregular forms in nature are reduced to a few regular geometric shapes. They produce simple, strong pictures that evoke the abstractions found in folk, “primitive” and contemporary art. (p. 5)

Indeed, young children show almost no hesitation in putting their ideas out into the world with no concern for mastery or visual sophistication of any sort. It is only as the preoperational stage wanes that hesitation, self-doubt, and the endless chorus for erasers can be heard.

Young children are free to let their drawn objects be seen for what they are in an authentic state and situation: a simplification and uncluttering of an idea and image at once. Many Modern artists believed this as well, such as Picasso, Klee, Chagall, Miró, Debuffet, Kandinsky, Klimt, and Rousseau to name just a few who studied and collected children’s art. We can also look at it from an art genre aspect by listing tribalism, primitivism, fauvism and symbolism because in each group the idea maintains
providence over realistic appearance. Their quest in art carried them, sometimes physically, from cultural centers and towards what they believed was a “truer” art. In retrospect, we can find reason in their expressive paths towards artistic integrity.

The imagination of a child is often cherished because it is so fleeting. The authenticity of their original ideas are deconstructed and reorganized with reasons in our technologically driven society and made to look just like everyone else’s. As Hugo Ball said in 1916: “To outdo one’s self in simplicity and child-like thoughts -- that is still the best defense” (Fineberg, 1997, p. 21). Based on my own art teaching experiences and my exploration of selected literature regarding the young child’s thinking and artmaking as presented in this chapter, I believe that elementary art teachers need to give greater attention to young children’s artmaking authenticity. We must follow our own hearts back to childhood, to the preoperational stage of development, in the hope that a glimpse or glimmer can shed its enlightenment to guide our teaching endeavors.
CHAPTER 3
MIRRORING PREOPERATIONAL LEARNERS’ THOUGHT PROCESSES THROUGH CREATIVE FREEDOM IN THE ART ROOM

In order to better comprehend how the rapture contained in the preoperational child’s artwork can be elucidated in the art classroom, I will now focus on a choice sampling of today’s art education curriculum guides, handbooks, and resources. All of the resources I review in this chapter show promising ideas and contribute to our present and eager position. It is my hope that we can employ every child’s special presence and innate knowledge in our educational system. More specifically, I would like to use whole-brain (left and right hemisphere) approaches to mapping an art curriculum for the preoperational thinker and beyond. For purposes of clarification, when I say left or right brain, I am not operating under the assumption that all of our rational thought flows strictly through the left brain, while emotional thought flows exclusively through the right brain. I believe that our individual mind’s processing abilities are far more complex than that, but for the purposes of this paper, using the labels of left and right brain should suffice.

For the most part, I will be focusing on the two-dimensional curriculum ideas presented in the resources in this chapter in an effort to illuminate how the preoperational thinker learns and in turn expresses that knowledge through their art. Young artists’ imagery is naturally flat and simplistic in design as they lack the knowledge base and
skills to make references to perspective and volumetric space. For the same reason their imagery emphasizes simple color variations rather than more complex concepts relating to value. As we view art as a tool for education we begin to see how preoperational learners’ pared-down formal complexities can assist us in understanding how we learn and communicate. The resources I have chosen to explore and present in this chapter all seem to agree that exposure to and experience with different materials and processes is the most important component in the overall development of every young learner’s art education, as well as that of a comprehensive art curriculum. Reviewing the resources for this chapter has solidified my opinion that the more structured an overall art curriculum is, the further it journeys from being a child-centered one. This is surely a counter-productive approach to education, albeit necessary in the current climate of standards-based education. In other words, when our instructional focus is on students consuming objective information and task performance, we tend to lose sight of the individual in education. If one is overly concerned with making sure all students know the primary and secondary colors and also how to mix the secondary colors from the primaries, it leaves little time to revel in everything else that can occur when young learners are presented with a piece of paper, a box of crayons, and a little bit of knowledge. Young learners experiment fearlessly with the concept of color mixing, so coming up with purple is an accomplishment, but it is commonplace when compared to the creative color compositions of recent memory. How justly we balance individual versus group needs is an ever-changing continuum that reaches far beyond the elementary art room. But art, as we are considering it here with the preoperational learner, has much to do with our unique perceptions and the origin of ideas.
It is easy to see in this bottom-line society why educators so often choose the curriculums that have a more organized and formal approach, because they also have an accepted ease of application, assessment, and greater accountability. Perhaps that is why the current trend in art education to develop standards-based curricula has an inherent weakness. The standards-based approach to generating an art education curriculum leans towards a left-brain type of thinking in compliance with local, state, and federal mandates. This fact, I believe, runs contrary to the natural tendencies and advantages of preoperational learners’ mental processes. Despite the vast amounts of knowledge that can be gained through the left-brain approach, it is my contention that much more will be conceded if we don’t balance our art curriculum with some right-brain philosophies and learning activities. Fortunately for the preoperational learner, art naturally offers us these unique educational opportunities. We need to be patient with preoperational learners and value their individual thoughts and their authentic creative endeavors rather than trudge them through materials, processes, and concepts in the name of efficiency and accountability. Young learners themselves are an incredible resource for creative knowledge and their own capabilities should not be ignored. All of the resources that I have reviewed for this chapter recognize these opportunities to varying degrees and now we can begin to explore them in depth.

Carolyn Boriss-Krimsky (1999) is the author of *The Creativity Handbook: A Visual Arts Guide for Parents and Teachers*. Boriss-Krimsky’s book focuses on children and their art as unique sources for meaningful imagery. Boriss-Krimsky has been teaching studio art to children for over twenty years in museums, classrooms, and mental health facilities. She views art as an innate tool for meaningful communication in
children that needs to be nurtured at every developmental stage. She separates the preoperational stage into two distinct stages:

The scribbling stage (2-4 years old) – The child moves from pure processing and exploration to relating scribbles to things in the environment. (p. 23)

The pre-schematic stage (4-7 years old) – The child continues to focus on the process of making art as she searches for a way to draw objects. Her artwork expresses what she honestly thinks and feels about a subject. (p. 23)

According to Boriss-Krimsky, during the first two stages of artistic development, the child is not concerned with good or bad in terms of aesthetics but in showing how he/she feels about something or someone.

Subsequent image making in older children is described by Boriss-Krimsky as follows:

The schematic stage (7-9 years old) – The child moves away from focusing on the process of making art and starts thinking about what he is producing. He develops a way of depicting forms and repeats it again and again. Drawings reflect what the child knows, not what he feels. (p. 23)

The shift in the schematic stage from an internal to an external barometer is intriguing. Is it a natural process of maturation, or is it just institutional conformity that sneaks up on us as our education progresses that eventually diverts our thought processes in similar directions? Do we all learn a certain way regardless of our instructional methods and practices? The discussion of why, how, and when this happens is a topic for further research beyond the scope of this thesis, yet it is raised by my thesis research.

Chapter 5 of The Creativity Handbook: “Art Projects for Children Ages 2 – 12” helps us refocus on the actual studio processes of the preoperational thinker. Boriss-Krimsky leads us through the scribbler, pre-schematic, and schematic stages with process-based themes for children’s artwork. She does not encourage specific lesson
plans instead she emphasizes tendencies of general experience by age group. Boriss-Krimsky claims that scribblers will enjoy the feeling of tearing up paper and gluing it down, as well as mark making of any kind on many surfaces. According to Boriss-Krimsky, pre-schematic children like to experiment with many different processes “during this period of rapid cognitive growth and prodigious artistic activity” (p. 91). In other words, we should work towards children’s strengths and interests by allowing them to experiment openly with materials and processes, rather than having highly structured lesson plans and outcomes. Boriss-Krimsky advocates that children in this age group should be given journals so that their own imaginative ideas can be captured and documented. She points out that coping in the world is tricky business, so providing children with opportunities for documenting some of their ideas and feelings through image making may help surface some issues that can easily be buried by our rational and reasonable constitutions. I agree with the author’s ideas here concerning the pre-schematic artist and intend to start some journal drawing lessons in the near future, in an effort to emphasize child-centered artwork and expression.

Boriss-Krimsky suggests giving children plenty of room to work because “sometimes they like to rotate their paper while they work” or “paint on the floor” (p. 92). These are processes or techniques that were not fully explored in Western art history until Cubism and Abstract Expressionism -- and yet young children do it naturally, without any prior knowledge of these genres. How many other art styles and ideas can be conceived or recognized in child’s play?

Later in the pre-schematic stage, children start to develop their drawing ability to the point where they can differentiate drawing types. They are generally referred to as
observation, recall, and memory or imagination. Boriss-Krimsky adds one more drawing technique to this list called automatic drawing, in which children “make a spontaneous scribble and then react to the scribble by looking for something else in it and develop it into a more complex image” (p. 100). I deem that a concept like automatic drawing sets a preoperational artist up for immediate results with the certainty of success. The ideas of preoperational thinkers can flourish using this technique, which works towards their strengths.

Another process that Boriss-Krimsky advocates, that I need to implement into my own curriculum, is the cutout-contour. They are simply contour drawings done using scissors instead of pencils, pens, etc. She claims that for some children this art process can alleviate the emphasis on drawing skills and help them to create images more freely. After exploring Boriss-Krimsky’s art making concepts in this chapter, I have come to realize that her emphasis in teaching children art is concerned with their imagination. She is not interested in children’s mastery of some external technical skills or knowledge. Because of this, I know I will be able to align some aspects of my curriculum project with her concepts.

In 2004, Mayersky put together a little cookbook of art recipes entitled Creative Arts & Activities: Crayon, Chalk and Markers, and I’m sure her intention was to reinforce students’ exposure to various art materials and processes. During the introduction she says, “The focus of this book and all early childhood art activities is the process, not the product. The joys of creating, exploring materials, and discovering how things look and work are all part of the creative process” (p. vii). I assert that the artwork a child creates is not just an exploration or an experience, it is also a product they take pride in. This
artwork communicates ideas to other viewers and also helps reveal further thoughts of the young artist. There are many books similar to this one by Mayersky, old and new, which by themselves do not reinforce the importance or necessity for a wide-ranging art education curriculum.

The little cookbook by Mayersky (2004) is an accompaniment to a five hundred sixty-three page resource called Creative Activities for Young Children, 6th edition, by Mayersky in 1998 that takes a comprehensive approach to art education. In this book, Mayersky has the opportunity to explain that, “…a successful [art] experience is one in which each child is inspired to express her own ideas…” (p. 167). She also takes the time to explain the many facets of children’s art education, which cannot be understood by someone just looking for a quick art recipe. Mayersky incorporates the concepts of left and right brain tendencies in all individuals, as well as our tendency to become more reliant on left-brain thinking as our education proceeds through the grade levels. She writes: “In short, most of our school curriculum is left-brained. We teach to the child who has a dominant left-brain” (p. 115). She contends that art has become the last bastion for educating right-brain thinkers. The preoperational thinker is naturally accustomed to thinking with the right brain and right-brain thinking creates what Mayersky calls mystery pictures. These are images that simply don’t seem to make any sense at all until the child talks about them.

Mayersky believes that children create art in three distinct ways: seeing, feeling and imagining. According to Mayersky, seeing can be paired with observation, but it also includes the other senses of touching, feeling (tactile), hearing, and smelling. Feeling is based on the emotion or tension a child feels about something he or she is
creating. Imagining is comprised of fantasy or non-reality, where images, memories, and
guesses become the focus of the child’s artwork. When considering Mayersky’s three-
pronged concept of children as creators, I believe it becomes difficult to attach objective
qualifying standards to their art. In young children’s art, feelings and imagination are
intertwined with their visualization of objects and other ideas. I concur with Mayersky’s
view that a child’s picture is a projection or reflection of who and what that child is at the
moment they create it.

*The Art of Teaching Art to Children in School and at Home* by Nancy Beal with
Gloria Bley-Miller (2001) is divided into chapters based on processes and the
accompanying materials. Beal and Miller open their chapter on drawing by saying
“Drawing is the most expressive of mediums, providing as it does a direct route outward
from a child’s heart. Whenever pencil and paper are available, children will
automatically draw” (p. 47). I agree with this quote and I have made it my own personal
habit to keep my art room tables covered with neutral colored paper whenever possible.
This helps with the general clean-up process but it also offers students a blank canvas on
which to put their thoughts, ideas, or studies. After no more than a couple of days,
usually less, I hang the mural sized 3’ x 12’ sheets with all the errant and intentional
marks on the wall in my classroom. It becomes a natural and communal celebration of
the students’ artwork. The paper on the table also functions as a respite for students who
finish their work early, which is inevitable when dealing with large numbers of students.

Along with the fact that children naturally draw, Beal and Bley-Miller emphasize
that drawing starts within, as a feeling and is then displayed outwardly. In other words,
the concept or the ideas for drawing have their genesis from within. This model is central
to my contention that young children’s artwork comes from deep within their soul, not from some externally learned processes. Even in the case of observation drawing one cannot dispose of the individual feelings that become attached to an object as it is drawn, no matter what the objective technical expertise involved entails.

Beal and Miller continue in their chapter on drawing by discussing other common materials, methods, and processes, but one concept that I thought was innovative was the use of wire to draw in space. Like Boriss-Brimsky’s cutout-collage concept of drawing with scissors, Beal and Miller have intrigued me by including this primarily 3-dimensional process in their chapter on drawing. Beal and Miller recommend using the wire with nine and ten year olds but I envision the older preoperational learners (six and seven year olds) attempting this process, using some finer gauge wire (pipe cleaners) to alleviate some possible technical issues associated with fine-motor skill development.

Maintaining an awareness of children’s technical and overall development is also vital to running a synchronized art program. According to Mona Brookes (1986), author of Drawing with Children: A Creative Teaching and Learning Method that Works for Adults, Too:

> Imagination always plays a part in proceedings. It is not a separate function existing independently from visual data. Integration of observation and imagination is what is needed. Again, I see both as necessary to the process, rather than any controversy as to which is better. (p. 11)

In art education, acknowledging that observation and imagination operate as partners, rather than as opposing forces, is the point from which our vision should radiate. My vision is based on imagination playing the major to observation’s minor role within the preoperational learner’s specific stage of development. Preoperational learners’ skills are developing through practice in the art room, but the way they forge their creative thinking
processes is of paramount value as their education proceeds. Keeping an open mind while imagining new ways to deal with issues and problems is desperately needed for life-long learning to occur.

Growing Artists: Teaching Art to Young Children, 3rd edition by Joan Bouza Koster (2005) offers art educators a well-organized overview of the ideas and concepts that must be addressed when preparing to teach a young child about art. Unlike many art education resources, Koster emphasizes the whole child when preparing to teach art, as opposed to just the young artist. Koster relies on understanding the individual child’s physical, mental, and emotional needs above all else, while developing a meaningful and creative art program. Koster mimics Buhler’s views when she says, “Art is the child’s first written language. It reflects how children’s minds are groping with and forming a concept of the world long before they can put their constructs into words” (p. 6). I believe that the preoperational learner is enabled with this intrinsic ability to uniquely organize, symbolize, and communicate as a baseline activity on which later graphic, mathematical, and language skills are built. It is these amazing abilities we foster as human beings that allow us to have free will in the world we inhabit. A young foal comes into the world and can almost instantly stand and run, just like a newborn whale propels itself effortlessly with the first flip of its tail in the ocean’s expanse. Instead of simple and pure, humankind’s development can be complicated and arduous, but from the preoperational stage onwards it is often filled with opportunities of ineffable creativity.

Koster uses Vygotsky’s socio-cultural perspective of past and present social interactions, as well as Howard Gardener’s theory of eight multiple intelligences or
different intellectual capabilities, as she develops a model for her art program. Although Koster identifies age appropriateness for the art materials and artistic processes of young artists, she does not use this as her main organizational framework like most of the other sources I have relied upon in this paper. Instead, Koster has created a true child-centered approach to art education by advocating that the child be allowed to experiment with images, materials, and processes limitlessly. Although unrealistic in our tightly structured school environments we can look to real life situations like the Reggio-Emilia school (Cadwell, 1997) where philosophies similar to Koster’s have flourished. Koster is concerned with giving students more time to explore and create with various materials and processes rather than setting so-called reasonable and age appropriate comprehensions and goals as our standards. In her book, in chapter three on drawing, Koster states “Children vary greatly in maturity level and ability to concentrate on an activity. The appropriateness of an activity should be based on each child’s day-to-day behavior rather than a chronological age” (p. 77). A lot of what Koster advocates seems to make immediate sense for our children’s education and at the same time we can also see how impractical her theories would be if implemented in our present day public school. I currently teach about 550 students on a six-day cycle, so the number of students taught would have to be reduced dramatically. This would be done in an effort to spend more time with individual students so that a better rapport could be built with them. Also, during the six-day cycle I only get to meet with each class for about 45 minutes, which means accommodating for inevitable absences as well. Art classes meet less than approximately one-fifth the time currently required for subjects such as math, reading,
and writing. It is unfortunate but sometimes time itself seems to be the most important factor, or detractor, in our educational process.

Laura H. Chapman has tried to alleviate some issues related to time constraints for art teachers by organizing a K-6 art curriculum resource. Chapman’s (1998) art education series called *Adventures in Art (K-6)* is the most comprehensive collection of art lesson ideas for elementary art teachers that I have found to date. It is a whole world approach to art education that includes different philosophies, cultures, and images of art throughout history. The resource binder also gives examples of specific lesson plans with great detail right down to helpful safety tips. Each grade level in Chapman’s *Adventures in Art* textbook (Grades 1-6), which is organized by themes, has a corresponding student textbook with visuals and questions aimed at stimulating and focusing the learning process. There is also an accompanying teacher’s text called a wrap-around edition, which contains organizational information for instruction. The teacher’s text groups the lessons into units with an overall scope and sequence. It also breaks the lessons into three main teaching categories of engage, explore, and create. I would like to highlight one of Chapman’s lessons for grade 1: unit 2, lesson 26, on page 60. All of the pertinent information for each lesson is condensed and organized onto two facing pages. A brief summary of this lesson is as follows:

**Monoprint of flowers:** visual of Bianca Gilchrest’s *Geraniums* 1991

**Engage:** introduce what the printing process is and how we are going to use it.

**Explore:** a demonstration of the monoprint technique with an accompanying explanation of the thought processes involved. Make suggestions for different techniques and variables of the process while demonstrating as well.

**Create:** Quickly refocus students on the lessons objectives, materials and techniques and then let them make art.
Most all of Chapman’s lessons are fun, original, and worthwhile learning experiences in art. For the purposes of my curriculum project I could not find one lesson plan that fit my needs completely, but I appreciate and hope to implement some of the organizational skills that Chapman brings to the forefront of art education. If there is a flaw in any of Chapman’s work it would probably be its vast nature. What I mean by this is that optimistically I probably meet with each class no more than thirty times per school year. When viewing all of the information and lessons contained in Chapman’s text for each grade level, it becomes apparent that a lot of the content would have to be skimmed or skipped because of time constraints. Considering other constraints such as budgetary concerns for supplies, or at times being forced to work from a cart because of the lack of classroom space, and one can see how frustrations arise. The art teacher must act as a buffer from these negative and discouraging elements so that every student’s creative endeavors can have a healthy environment in which to flourish.

Generally our public education system starts in Kindergarten, and Laura Chapman’s Adventures in Art series does as well. Chapman is a consulting author for Cynthia Colbert and Martha Taunton (1998) who co-wrote the Kindergarten Teacher’s Guide text for the Adventures in Art series. The Kindergarten and 1st grade overall text format is organized in a similar fashion with a few exceptions. The kindergarten units are always constituted by three lessons, whereas from the first grade on, units can extend to include sixteen lessons or more. This simple variation allows kindergarten students to associate a more consistent rhythm to their art room experience. Kindergarten students are being asked to assimilate new images, methods, and materials at an astounding rate during their first year at school. By always using three lessons to a unit, instead of as a
kindergarten student might perceive, a haphazard beginning and endpoint to any given exploration, Colbert and Taunton are synchronizing the kindergarten students learning within a new and structured environment we define as school. How best to structure a learning environment is constantly up for debate and I have some issues with time constraints amongst other things, but perhaps this is an issue for another paper. Chapman, Colbert, and Taunton have worked diligently to creatively embrace the current structure and resources of our educational system. They have created an art education resource for today’s art classroom. However, is our current art classroom best utilizing and supporting a preoperational thinker’s left and right-brain capabilities?

Barbara Heberholz and Lee Hanson (1985) hold some common views on contemporary art education but they also carve out some new and interesting insights. In chapter eight of Early Childhood Art, Heberholz and Hanson discuss the drawing and painting processes simultaneously, appropriately so because of their two-dimensional properties. In addition, I have not come across a preoperational thinker that differentiates or creates a hierarchy between the two mediums, as is the norm in our adult-oriented culture. Heberholz and Hanson write that “Throughout history painting has been a mirror for man’s feelings and ideas about his world” (p. 102). Furthermore they state, “Drawing and thinking are often all-at-once phenomenon making a graphic image an extension of the mental process and helping to bring an idea into focus” (p. 102). Heberholz and Hanson take the position that drawing and painting are practical and natural tools, which reside in individuals for the purpose of communication and learning. This cuts to the core of our perception of a person (including each child) being a unique and autonomous individual, while also playing integral roles as members of the ever-changing world we
experience. In my view, our art can help us work through personal thoughts, ideas, and challenges, and when others view the images and respond to them then the concepts transform and proliferate far beyond their original intent. What would the inventor of the wheel think of the modern automobile? Or cave artists think of digital imagery?

Heberholz and Hanson share the common contemporary thread in art education, which is to compartmentalize drawing into three main areas of observation, memory, and imagination. They also concur that drawing and painting from observation is a learned behavior enabled by the elements and principles of art. They go on to say, “Drawing from the imagination can result in delightful and highly original scenes that exist only in the child’s mind” (p. 104). This quote provides a glimpse of the possibilities that the preoperational child’s individual thought process can offer. When children paint or draw from their imagination, images no longer exist only in their minds but are now revealed to the rest of the world. I expect that preoperational thinkers’ art experiences could allow us to explore and discover the untapped resources of their minds. More specifically, I hope that by investigating preoperational thinkers’ art, one can begin to understand in a more general way why art is so important as a way of thinking, seeing, and communicating in our world.

Perhaps an example of observation drawing from a quantum-physics level would be helpful. We can “improve” the images we make from observation and perhaps to some extent from our memory, using the elements and principles of art as our guide. In our first example, we draw a red flower with a green stem while looking at a tulip. In our second example, we try to improve our drawing by observing that the petals and stem have areas of lighter and darker value. In our third drawing, we also incorporate
highlights and details like the yellow stamen in the center of the pointed blooms. We can continue to “improve” our drawing by adding the textured striation in the stems and leaves and so on, but this process eventually exhausts itself. Using the elements and principles of design as our guide to creating a drawing is a slippery slope because we are engaging in a process that breaks down the objects we are observing, ad infinitum. Eventually, if following this process out to its end, we find atoms, neurons, electrons, etc., floating around in what is best described as probability patterns (translation: we don’t know for sure what they’re doing, or when they’ll be there, or for how long). I suggest that our ideas float around in our minds similar to the way that atoms bobble about in our bodies or in the bloom of a flower. This idea becomes much easier to conceptualize when you consider that viewing a piece of solid granite (or any other object) under an electron microscope reveals mostly empty space. On a sub-atomic level we are spirit-like with no apparent physical boundaries. As we experiment with different materials and processes in art, in conjunction with the imagination of a young child, one might envision the creation of some amazing probability patterns.

For the preoperational learner, Heberholz and Hanson suggest simple ideas with regards to materials and processes that have far-reaching possibilities. For example, they recommend handing out paper of different sizes, shapes, or textures and then having the students create suitable subjects on them. If it is a long piece of paper, children may draw a train, or a tall piece may be the starting point for a giraffe. Exposing young artists to different materials and processes presents them with problem-solving issues that helps them begin to make sense of the world they are a part of. Access to various materials broadens young artists’ imaginations and expands their intellectual horizons. A
preoperational thinker may choose to create the shortest and fattest giraffe in the world on a wide piece of paper, which at first seems impractical or unreasonable. Upon further contemplation, we realize that the crux of any original idea lies in its ability to break with tradition or commonly held viewpoints.

I like to imagine a young Christopher Columbus in art class, tossing the flat map of the world into the trash can and replacing it with a voluminous globe; in so doing, he changed the way we perceive our entire world. Anything is possible in a young child’s mind and the artwork he or she creates should remind us of the power in that belief.
In this chapter, I present an elementary art lesson plan that I developed and then taught to young children. While creating this lesson plan, I tried to keep in mind many of the resources and ideas that I had explored throughout my thesis research. The lesson engages students in each creating a unique work of art that begins with just a splotch of paint. The materials involved in this paint splotch creation are the constant, whereas the actual processes and follow-up student classroom activities are more undirected, which allows the students to rely more heavily on their individual creativity. When I taught this lesson, I directed the students to create a flower or other image from the paint splotches, but I demonstrated that the splotch of color should be applied quickly and it need not resemble a flower in any way and, therefore, need not result in an image of an actual flower. My intent with this lesson is to provide preoperational learners with visually rich artmaking materials and the opportunity for each child to utilize their own creative ideas in making a unique artwork. After presenting this lesson plan, I then analyze and reflect on teaching this lesson and the student artwork that resulted.
Art Lesson Title: Beginning with a Paint Splotch to Create an Image

Overview Plans:

In this lesson, students will first use a wooden tongue depressor and tempera paint to make “splotches of paint” on colored construction paper. Then students will continue to add to these colorful random shapes with paintbrushes and/or crayons to create a flower or other unique image of their own design, which may or may not turn out to be a flower. Students will be encouraged to talk with one another about their paint splotches and what they see in them to guide their artmaking. If a student does not see a flower in their “painted splotch,” then they are expected to develop whatever it is that they do see on their paper. Students can be shown visuals such as Purple Robe and Anemones, by Henri Matisse (1937) and reproductions of other exemplary artwork in order to reinforce the dramatic effects that can be obtained using colors and shapes. As the students finish, a few of their artworks that have dealt effectively with shape and color will be held up and discussed. Positive reinforcement will be given to all at this juncture.

Grade Level: Pre-Kindergarten - 2nd

Special Needs Accommodations:

Some students with more profound fine-motor control difficulties may benefit greatly from this opportunity to experiment with the tempera paint medium. A paint “splotch” is something that all students can generate and this lesson need not culminate with an image
of a flower. Shapes and colors can be explored freely by all students with full encouragement for all imagery produced during this lesson.

**Time Frame:**

This lesson can be completed in one 45-minute class period. However, one may consider completing the “splotch painting” part of the lesson separately, because there are some advantages to sequencing the lesson in this manner. For instance, beginning an art period with a completed and dry splotch painting will more fully encourage reflection and thoughtfulness before the students emerge themselves in the paint medium again. The actual splotch painting takes less than a minute to create although the entire splotch painting process with preparation and clean up will take approximately ten minutes.

**Art Lesson Goals and Objectives:**

*National Visual Arts Content Standard 1- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes*

Students will apply tempera paints with a tongue depressor and with a paintbrush using different techniques to help them gain a better understanding of the media.

*Achievement Standard c- Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories: Students will use tempera paints, a tongue depressor, and a paintbrush to communicate their idea of a flower (or another image of their choice). The students’ images may communicate separate or related ideas, experiences, and stories as well.*

*National Visual Arts Content Standard 2- Using knowledge of structures and functions:*
Students will use their knowledge of line, **shape**, size (relationships), **color**, placement, texture, etc., to create a flower (or other image) on their papers.

*Achievement Standard c- Students use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas:* Students will use selected elements and principles of design to create imagery that communicates their ideas. The ideas communicated may be as basic as a flower or other subject matter imagery of their choice or more complex ideas concerning feelings and relationships.

**Evaluation:** 1-The art instructor should check to see how effectively the students have used both a tongue depressor and a paintbrush to apply tempera paint (including crayons if used for this lesson). C- The art instructor should check to see how the students’ work communicates their ideas, experiences or stories. This can be done by looking at the students’ work directly, or by having a conversation with a student, or by listening to the students’ conversations before, during, and after they finish.

2-The art instructor will visually check to see how effectively the students used their knowledge of line, shape, size (relationships), color, placement, etc., to create a flower (or other image) on their papers. Are they on task? C- Along with visually checking to see if and how students are using selected elements and principles of design to communicate their ideas, an art instructor invariably relies on conversation with a student, or by listening to the students’ conversations before, during, and after they finish creating their artwork.
Art Supplies and Equipment Needed:

- 12”x18” construction paper (light pastel colors), one for every student
- One tongue depressor for every student
- A smock for every student
- Newspaper to cover the art tables
- Tempera paints (all primary, all secondary, black, and brown) paint trays and cups
- A paintbrush for every student (medium-sized stiff bristles)
- Water cups (for students to clean their brushes when they change colors)
- A pencil for each student (to write their names on the back of the construction paper)
- Crayons (optional) Great to use if art lesson is completed in two sessions.

Exemplary Artworks Focused Upon/Visuals (optional):

Redon, Odilon, Vase of Flowers, 1916, pastel on paper.

Van Gogh, Vincent, Sunflowers, 1888, oil paint.

Matisse, Henri, Flowers in a Pitcher, 1906, oil on canvas.

Matisse, Henri, Purple Robe and Anemones, 1937, oil on canvas.

O’Keeffe, Georgia, Oriental Poppies, 1928, oil on canvas.

Preparation:

- Hang visuals
- Pour tempera paints as well as clean water into cups and place those securely into trays
• Gather enough construction paper, pencils, smocks, and brushes for every student
• Cover tables with newspapers
• Empty drying rack to accommodate wet paintings

Exploration of topic and art concepts:

Part I Paint Splotch Creation- this part of the lesson is all about painting a splotch of tempera paint on colored construction paper using a tongue depressor. To get started, we all need to make a splotch. What is a splotch? How do you make a paint splotch? Why are we using a tongue depressor? Can you make a splotch incorrectly? (No!) Let the students’ answers lead in all directions, but after a short period of time explain to students that a paint splotch is a blob or small amount of paint that is spread out in some fashion. A splotch has color and shape. I want everyone’s paint splotch to have just one color (of their choice) although it can be any shape. A quick demonstration will convey to the students that a splotch is created sloppily and without intention. The splotch should be the color that they want, but the shape should be somewhat of a surprise, even though they are the ones creating it. Suggest closing their eyes while they create their splotch if they are having difficulty with the concept of letting go of artistic intention.

Part II: Flower Image Creation- this part of the lesson takes us from paint splotch to flower image. We are transitioning from accidental shape formation and random color of paint made with a tongue depressor to intended shapes and purposeful selection of color created using a paintbrush (or crayons). Why are we using a paintbrush (crayons) now?
Utilizing any of the exemplary visuals for this lesson, the students will be asked if they like any of the flowers that can be seen in them. The teacher will narrow their focus with a sequence of questions: Which one(s)? What color(s) is it? What shapes do you see? Encourage the students to come up and point, or trace out the shapes they see with their fingers. What else do you see in the visuals? Is there anything else (any other images) in the visuals? Why? How big are they? What colors and shapes did the artist use and why? What do you like about one of these artworks? Explain why you like that part.

**Art Activity:**

Part I: Paint Splotch Creation- as noted earlier, this can be completed in about ten minutes so it may fit in nicely with another painting lesson that tends to finish early or if the subsequent class is working with paints.

1. Make sure that all preparations have been completed before class begins.
2. Tell the students that they will be using tempera paints in art class today. This automatically gets the students more revved up and it also indicates to them that they will need to do some preparations.
3. Smocks are retrieved and put on by table group.
4. Tables are covered with newspaper (if not already done).
5. Paints and water are passed out.
6. Construction paper and pencils are passed out and students are asked to write their name on the back of their paper. Pencils are collected.
7. The teacher will stand in front of the class and hold up a tongue depressor and ask the students what it is. Once the students answer, then the teacher will then explain to them that they will be using them to paint a splotch (see exploration part I – splotch).
8. Hand out tongue depressors and splotch away!

9. Walk around with a small trash can after the students have had approximately one minute of work time and ask them to throw their tongue depressors away (be persistent as you will meet resistance).

Part II: Creating a Flower (image) with Paintbrush – if completing this project on two separate days you will need to repeat steps 1-5 and then hand out the students’ completed splotches. If completing this project in one class period, then recapture the students’ attention immediately after they have thrown out their tongue depressors by directing their eyes towards the visuals being utilized for the lesson.

1. See Exploration Part II: Flower Image Creation

2. Hand out crayons or if using paintbrushes reinforce the importance of thoroughly washing out paintbrushes every time they decide to change colors. It is important to keep the colors unmuddled and clean for one another so that everyone has the most colors to choose from. Also, direct students to wipe the extra water out of their brush on the side of the water cup and/or on the newspaper.

3. Walk around and encourage the students to work while talking with them about their creations. Encourage discussions between the students about the images they are creating.

**Clean Up:**

When we start a project, I always indicate approximately how much time we will have to complete it, or how much time we will have to work on it that day. As the students work
on their art, it is important for them to be reminded of how much time they have left before they need to start cleaning up. I usually indicate the halfway point and then I also let them know when they have just a few minutes of work time remaining. Public schools are time-regimented institutions, and it is important for the students to know that there will be time limitations put on their artmaking. When time is up, students will be asked to put their paintbrushes into the nearest water cup to indicate that they are ready to have their artwork put in the dry rack. Once a student’s artwork has been put in the drying rack, then they can proceed to the sinks to wash and dry their hands. Finally, students may put their smocks back on a hook to dry before lining up at the classroom door.

**Closure:**

When all of the students are quietly lined up they are asked specific questions to reinforce learning for that lesson. The questions can refer to student work, materials and processes used, and/or the exemplary visuals. The students should be encouraged to use terminology discussed earlier such as, line, shape, size (relationships), color, placement, texture, etc. when answering. Questions such as the following could be asked in reference to a few randomly selected student artworks:

- How many flowers do you see in this image?
- Where is the flower and why is it so hard to find?
- I don’t see a flower in this image but what are we looking at? Describe it.
- Did this student use a tongue depressor or a paintbrush to make the petals? Why do you think so?
- Would the person who made this artwork please tell us about making it?
Some interesting questions can be based on comparison as well.

Whose flower is bigger, brighter, happier or sad? Why do you think so?

**Extension Ideas:**

- Students could be given their choice of colored paper, scissors, and glue to create a flower or other image, which would isolate the elements of color and shape.
- Students could use crayons or oil pastels instead of tempera paints when working from a dry paint splotch. This would give students a more controlled medium to work with and one would expect greater detail with a potential for more developed imagery. It is important to note that by alternating media one would also need to make other adjustments when teaching this lesson, i.e., the art element of line would be emphasized over shape.
- A similar lesson could be done with colored pipe cleaners. The students could choose their color and they would all start with a straight object that they would then need to manipulate into a flower. The students could also be given more than one pipe cleaner to complete their imagery or object(s). The art element of form would start to take precedence in this type of lesson.
- By choosing different exemplary visuals of flowers one could emphasize specific art elements or characteristics. A good example of this is the scratchy textured effects in Christian Rolff’s *Sunflowers*.
- An extension of this lesson can be administered by bringing in real flowers or photographs of flowers (real or fake), or going outside to look at flowers.
• This lesson can also be finished without mentioning or showing any exemplary visuals of flowers. By not having a pre-requisite object in mind a child’s imagination is set free but concepts concerning structures and functions cannot be elucidated as readily.

• Three-Dimensional lessons using clay or sculpy could be done as well to create flower “cookies.”
Commentary on Student Artwork Resulting from the Art Lesson Plan: Beginning with a Paint Splotch to Create an Image

The most fun anyone can have in the art room, besides creating their own art, is looking at children’s art and seeing what is happening in their pictures. After many years of looking over little shoulders, arms, and hands while speculating about the children’s creations before me, I am perpetually delighted and enlightened. Young children’s artwork is a pathway for their personalities to shine through. Their images lead me in countless directions with endless suppositions along the way. Watching, listening, and interacting with children while they create their art fortifies the importance of art education. Children’s artwork is the genesis and culmination of the curriculum because materials and processes, although generally referred to as starting point for developing a scope and sequence for early childhood art education, become secondary when viewing their artistic accomplishments. I say this because be it crayons, markers, paint, or sticks in the sand, it is young children’s minds made visual that we value. I am not opposing the many fine art curriculum frameworks that I reviewed in the previous chapter, but I am choosing to not reinvent the wheel. If one were to take one whole, or selected parts of the many curriculum resources, and then weave in some freedoms so that children have the feeling of autonomy, this would provide what is necessary for true learning to take place. For as Piaget says, “In order for a child to understand something, he must construct it himself, he must reinvent it” (Piaget, Inhelder, & Garcia, 1975). I stated earlier that young children have difficulty separating themselves from their work and in many circumstances the objective information offered to young learners has much less importance than the other ideas spinning around in their heads. This concept is of
primary importance when developing lesson plans for young learners and therefore an art curriculum. If an art curriculum being designed for preoperational learners is too strictly adhered to it will become problematic. As the saying goes, if you want to hear children laugh, tell them your plans.

While creating my curriculum project, I kept this in mind and started with tempera paint “splotches.” The materials involved in splotch creation are relatively constant whereas actual processes and follow-up activities are more undirected, which allows the students to rely more heavily on their own individual creativity. The students were given standard 12” x 18” construction paper, a tongue depressor, and tempera paints in separate cups. The students could choose any one of the primary, secondary, black, or brown colors and apply a splotch of color to their paper using the tongue depressor. The students were told that they could create a flower from the splotches but I demonstrated that the splotch of color should be applied quickly and it need not resemble a flower in any way. Note: All illustrations are provided in Appendix A. Illustrations 1-4 establish both a random sampling of the students’ resulting paint splotch compositions and the diversity of our human hands at work given the same instructions at the outset of our lesson. Once the paint splotches were applied to their papers, I had the students throw their tongue depressors away. Then some classes continued working with brushes and paints, while in other classes the paint medium was replaced in favor of crayons. Their images took shape quickly and without hesitation in this lesson and the emphasis is not on nature (an actual flower) or on other artists’ representations of nature (although it could be). Instead I wanted to optimize the young artists’ abilities to create and communicate with artistic media through a lesson that focused on their precious reality.
and ideas. By turning to specific illustrations of their finished images we can see how my plan for this curriculum project is reinforced, thwarted, and outdone with each child’s unique artwork.

We will begin by looking at the paint splotch and crayon illustrations. In Illustration 5a, one can see an example of a child’s completed artwork for this lesson. Six red petals of uniform size and a thick green stem with two leaves done in crayon have surrounded the colorful rounded orange paint splotch in the center. One can easily see the outlines for the petals, stems, and leaves were completed before they were colored in with like colors. Illustration 5b also reinforces the lesson concepts and it starts with a similar orange paint splotch at the center of a flower with reddish petals and a green stem and leaves completed in crayon. However, Illustrations 5a and 5b are unique in several different ways. Illustration 5a has a stem that measures two inches across in some spots and it is approximately nine inches tall, which gives the flower an almost tree like presence on the page. The bloom on the flower is large and bold and it maintains its stature on top of the thick stem using uniformity of crayon stroke, petal shape, and size. Illustration 5b, although much smaller in overall dimensions, taking up no more than a four by six inch space on the page, creates its attendance in other ways. The stem is made with a single stroke of a green crayon over the top of a single stroke from a red crayon, which simultaneously creates a dark contrasting brown stem that maintains its slight nature and also concedes power and emphasis to the bright bloom. The flower is located off-center and while the short stem begins beneath the halfway point on the vertically-oriented page the bloom is completely on the upper half of the page, reinforcing its significance. Fading downward one can see the leaves of the stem were
drawn with very little pressure and amount to nothing more than a few swirls with proper placement that sort of fall away and wilt as they were executed. There are fifteen to eighteen reddish petals on the bloom depending on how you differentiate them, and although similar they each have very unique lengths, widths, and overall compositions, which add to their visual interest and keep your eyes moving. In addition, while coloring in the petals, the young artist has sloppily overlapped onto the orange center creating fluorescent red highlights, which allows for an unexpected added intensity. In both Illustrations 5a and 5b there is nothing else to distract from the flowers in the image such as ground, sky, sun, etc. The young artists have each created a unique flower image that began as a simple splotch of paint; both meet the objective of my lesson plan. Although they are quite unaware of the way I view their work, I try to pass along to my young students some of the information that is detailed above in casual kid-friendly language where time permits. The young artists have created flowers that allude to Jonathan Fineberg’s (1997) theories in *The Innocent Eye*. The children extrude the essence of “a flower” in what I consider to be modern art masterpieces that deal with mesmerizing and tangible qualities despite their naïveté. There is something quite magical that happens in children’s art because they are not trying to represent something outside themselves but rather deal with objects in a very personal manner. The flowers are executed on a rudimentary skill level but reveal rich, complex, and symbolic thought processes. Viewed in this way, the preoperational artists’ oxymoronic flower images are bold, sensitive, and imaginative. The preoperational learner creates in this constant state of connectedness to objects and ideas where reflection and hesitancy doesn’t hinder their sense of fulfillment. The very objective qualities we have learned to standardize and
therefore pass judgment on has not crept into the preoperational learner’s critical consciousness. As young learners’ knowledge base grows, I believe that art teachers must be careful not to erode their confidence by placing too much emphasis on developing their technical skills. One can help achieve this by simply allowing the students to make their art and refrain from critical commentary once they are creating. I find that positive reinforcement or planned silence during the artistic process may be helpful in most cases.

Next, we will be examining images executed with paint splotches and crayon that not only reinforce my lesson plan ideas but also outdo them in many ways. Illustrations 6, 7, and 8 are wonderful examples of student artwork that surpass the premise of my lesson plan without any, or very little, extraneous additions such as people, suns, trees, or other flowers. All three images were initiated with splotches of paint that consume a very large portion of the paper, which in and of itself were beyond my original thinking for this lesson. In all of the images, the students have made a single flower that overflows the edges of the paper, which right at the outset gives them a monumental existence on the page. Illustration 6 shows a solid large red splotch with an almost rectangular shape and thirteen red petals made in crayon with a similar rectangular shape. The rectangular shapes mimic the shape of the paper and builds immediate confluence (keep this in mind when considering size, shape, and color of paper for art projects), while the texture of the crayon petals and the thick and bold application of the paint splotch distinguish them as separate parts of a whole. The single green crayon stroke for a stem adds an almost comic relief in contrast to the overpowering bloom. The two green leaves on the stem are drawn with similar textures as the petals, while their shape also carries out the rectangular
theme. This young artist has also added some green grass at the bottom using horizontal crayon marks that cover the entire length of the page. The grass never rises above perhaps a half an inch high, which further adds to the prominence of the flower, while simultaneously providing enough sustenance to the fragile stem so that it seems capable of holding up the bloom.

Sometimes there are surprises as students transition from paint splotch to flower or other image creation. Illustration 7 is the continuation from Illustration 4, which began as what I thought was an unmistakable bright orange sun with eight extending rays. Actually the rays were skeletal arms on which the student constructed large (approximately 6") different colored petals. The bloom is so monumental that there is literally no room for a stem or anything else in the picture and only two of the petals fit comfortably on the page. This student also detailed some purplish crayon spots over the paint splotch for added visual interest.

Often students become absorbed in the processes that evolve from the materials used in a particular project. In Illustration 8, we can see a flower that began as an outsized purple paint splotch that covers nearly three quarters of the surface of the paper. The overall shape is compromised in favor of exhibiting how the tongue depressor can be used to create different textures and lines. The young artist worked very hard to bring us back to the idea of a flower by using crayon in the center of the splotch in a circular motion. The student also makes a small (2” tall) rudimentary stem with two leaves that can best be described as looking like it is trying to balance the gigantic bloom above it. There are twenty-four diminutive pink petals of similar size and shape and while some are entirely overlapping the purple center, others are completely outside of it. None of
the pink petals are drawn around the bottom of the flower for reasons unknown. The image could be a monster, a Viking ship, a Ferris wheel, or an actual intended flower. This student’s skillful efforts capture the viewers’ attention through the artist’s absolute playfulness.

Next, we will be looking at images done with paint splatters and crayon that thwart my lesson plans, in respect to making a flower exclusively but are regardlessly learning experiences for all. Looking at Illustration 9, one can see that this student has dutifully made a red flower with green stems and leaves, but then he continues to create forms in the picture that contain what he was really interested in doing in art class on this particular day. There is an orange giraffe with red spots, which perhaps represent a favorite animal or a recent trip to the zoo. This artist has taken the idea a step further by placing a rudimentary yet satisfactory image of himself riding the giraffe using a red circle (approximately 2” diameter) for a face with two diagonal red lines coming down from the face at angles. The child shows amazing economy in conveying his general ideas in this image while at the same time by making the two blue spots for eyes and a simple curved red line for a smile he portrays individuality and a mood. He has also drawn in a pink and red heart in the middle of the page, a sun in the upper left corner, some grass on the ground, and blue sky in the background. He has set the scene and fortified the mood with these details and one must keep in mind while surveying this image that the minimal criterion for success in this lesson was to create a flower or other image beginning from a paint splotch.

Illustration 10 shows a purple splotch that has been haphazardly spread out to cover nearly three quarters of the surface, with green, red, white, and pink crayon being
used to create unidentifiable markings about the page. Further study reveals a small flower has indeed been drawn on top of the purple splotch and then it has even been put within a red outlining border that is in the shape of a house. It is obvious that this student was enjoying experimenting with the art materials in this lesson while also fulfilling the simple flower image criteria. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to have a conversation with her about the intriguing imagery.

The final paint and crayon Illustration 11 has squelched the teacher-directed flower idea completely in favor of a big dinosaur. The fat red paint splotch makes up the body of the dinosaur, while single crayon lines create the green legs and black neck. A circle with two green dots and a curved green line for eyes and a mouth completes the neck. The dinosaur is made so that it is as tall as the page allows and it is made to appear even larger by curving the long neck into a C-shape that goes off the page while allowing the dinosaur’s head to just barely reappear on the page. It is no small accomplishment to, in effect, articulate an image that is larger than the actual space allotted. Although simply drawn, this child’s design mechanics are quite complex. The young artist has also used red crayon to draw himself in the lower middle part of the page. He has drawn himself with a circle for a head, a rectangle for a body, and two short vertical lines for legs. He has also drawn arms and hands that are made up of discomfited circles and lines that are open and embracing and at one point the hand is actually touching the dinosaur. Perhaps he is showing a symbolic, gestural, and literal kinship with the dinosaur in his image. It’s as if he is trying to give his long lost buddy a big hug. There is also a sun in the upper right hand corner of the image as well as a large tree on the right hand side of the page both done in crayon. In my opinion, it is not a
coincidence that the tree and the dinosaur have both been drawn using similar colors because they are big, tall, old, looming, and yet approachable objects to this youth.

There is incredible sophistication in preoperational learners’ art, which becomes evident if we simply allow ourselves to look at their images with the knowledge we contain in our oeuvre rather than approaching them with presuppositions of students’ conscious abilities. There is so much to be found in the unencumbered efforts of children’s artwork that we art teachers need to STOP, look, listen, and learn more as we try to teach.

This is a good opportunity to survey some images completed by young artists using only tempera paint. Because the paint medium is fluid and fast, resulting in bold colors and shapes, it is ideally suited for preoperational learners’ ideas and artistic expressions. The time for critical calculations and hesitancy for fear of mistakes has no place with Kindergarten students armed with brushes and tempera paint! The young learners become one with their ideas taking shape on the page. With their brushes waving wildly they resemble a conductor with a baton orchestrating beautiful music as the unique rhythm and melodies of their images beseech an audience to pay close attention!

Illustration 12 is a preeminent example of preoperational student artwork that shows the promise and power of the visual arts. This student started with a simple yellow paint splotch in the middle of her paper, which she did not add petals to so it retains a rounded face shape. She created a green stem and leaves that are more in proportion with the human torso and arms, which reaches up in exaltation towards the bright orange sun. The sun has been painted in such a fashion that it resembles a great bird swooping down
with wings outstretched: not straight down in a dive but both at once reaching out
towards the waiting flower, enjoying the warmth on its bloom as we do on our own skins,
and resisting an actual embrace. The flower and the sun take up so much room on the
page that the sun and its rays actually need to bend awkwardly around the flower to form
a half inch perimeter of no contact, which adds to the tension of impending combustion if
the two were ever to meet. The lively flower bursts upwards emerging from the rich
purple ground in a way that creates wavy mounds at the base of the stem. The rest of the
background has been covered in a straight-from-the-bottle-blue paint with amazing
accuracy considering the difficulty of working around four areas of transition (bloom,
sun, ground, stem and leaves) to different colors of wet paint. There are two dots of blue
background paint that are on the sun, which resemble a mouth and an eye that stare at the
black stamen in the center of the bloom, which resemble a screaming face. These last
two details complete the personification of the sun and the flower and allow us to think
about them in the context of natural living entities. The detailed composition of this
image celebrates its splendor as a complete and harmonious masterpiece.

Continuing with the idea of masterpieces of the elementary classroom, we see in
Illustration 13 that this child has created numerous connections to his orange paint
splotch. The most immediate impact is created by the absence of a flower despite the
obvious opportunity that is exhibited by the flower-shaped sun in the center of the paper.
Along with the sun, this young artist has included simplified images representing a deer,
bird, bug, person, and a big black outline of a face for God. The basic skills he used to
create the imagery may have been more difficult to decipher except for the keystone,
which is the word *Heven* painted in yellow tempera over the top of a sky-blue
background paper. The fact that this child was willing to spell a word he was unsure of in a permanent media exemplifies the state of delight in which he created the artwork. Although the word is misspelled, it still conveys the ideas of his imagery and instantly we can also appreciate both the trifling nature of spelling as it relates to his art and ironically to his theme of an omniscient entity.

Student Illustrations 14, 15, and 16 differ from the previous illustrations examined in that they are all prime examples of color-field artworks. These illustrations show a particular tendency towards geometric abstraction while all of the other images that the students created for this lesson have a more concrete symbolism. Shapes and colors are combined on the page in a fashion that shows an almost complete disregard for the initial flower concept of this art lesson. Color and surface are easily accessible waiting to be explored and synthesized by the artist and the viewer. Illustrations 15 and 16 show student artwork that is focused on geometric shapes while Illustration 14 deals with bending bio-morphic constituents. In all three circumstances, we can see how the preoperational learner’s specific stage of development is naturally suited to color-field art in that the images resemble well-known artworks by Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, and other like artists of this genre. It is our human nature to be intrigued by shape and color. How else can one explain both the popularity of color-field art and the similarity of the children’s images to them? I have never shown these students color-field reproductions nor did we discuss them before this lesson, not to mention their inability to consciously understand such intellectual constructs. How do children unknowingly create such masterful art? Where does it come from? A comprehensive art education program negotiates these questions and balances skill building and concept attainment with
providing exploratory materials and processes for individuals and groups. Using developmental benchmarks and building a useful vocabulary through the elements and principles of design a child can begin to understand formal art concepts, while they continue to use the power of the visual arts for personal creative expression. Art that begins as a natural form of communication in children should not stop just as they learn to read and write more effectively. Rather this is an opportunity to embellish education with the knowledge and creative character of right-brain thinking in the art room.

Other student artwork resulting from this art lesson demonstrates how students readily develop themes as they create their artwork. Illustration 17 exhibits the topic of autumn. It is comprised of six fall-colored leaves of similar size and shape (approximately 2” to 4”) being blown around the untouched white austere background. All of the leaves have a distinctive unifying brown stem which also aids us in orienting the direction the leaves are traveling. Three of the leaves are almost completely horizontal and two are nearly vertical, which leaves one diagonal leaf that is one quarter off the page. The placement and position of the leaves creates the sensation of a swirling intermittent wind that is synonymous with fall in New England. This Kindergarten student, although lacking the verbal or written skills to convey such meaning, successfully communicates her ideas with paint on paper. The student grounds her imagery with a simple jagged green line that runs the entire length of the bottom edge of the paper.

Illustration 18 continues with the theme of seasons. The distinct formation of the flower is just one characteristic of many in this painting that alludes to the concept of spring. It includes a large six-inch high flower that evolved from the original blue paint
splotch in the center of the page. There is blue sky at the top of the page and an outsized yellow sun with rays extended. At the bottom left of the page there is green grass painted in evenly, but to the right of the flower, under the sun, there are four bumps in the grass which indicate that the loaded soil will soon be giving origin to even more flora. To the right of the flower, the young artist has painted a tree using painterly brushstrokes indicative of the rough texture of bark. There are small budding leaves emerging from the tender brown branches and at the tip of one branch there is a brown bird painted in flying above the flower and towards the sun. The bird is brown and painted so that it appears to be camouflaged in as part of the branch just as the child (and nature) intended.

Soon the children who completed these images will begin to explore more complicated color theories, three-dimensional forms, etc., and the mission of all art teachers should be to urge them on. I believe that by allowing young children to advance at their own pace while praising the remarkable art they are creating is of paramount value in the art classroom and beyond. Intention, although important in many instances, can be quite irrelevant with preoperational learners. The materials, processes, and concepts of certain lesson plans may be used as the instructor intended but in many cases they cannot be used as planned. Individual impulses, issues, and reactions to lesson plans are played out as students personalize their artwork while they create it. This should be celebrated in elementary art education. It is imperative that children are given the time to experiment, explore, and invent in the art room. I believe that the creative outcomes of the art lesson presented in this thesis demonstrates that preoperational learners’ special thought processes are capable of broadening their minds and everyone else’s horizons through their personal discoveries, original ideas, and artistic expressions.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Children in the preoperational stage of development do not merely give us creative and original artwork to view, they offer us various opportunities for our own intellectual growth. Our perceptions can be enhanced through young children’s art if we can just remain open to the naïve and pure ideas manifested in their work. To do this, I believe that we art teachers must change the way we respond to our young students’ often seemingly perpetual state of ingenuity as opposed to enforcing our often structured and static will. As imposing as change can seem, new innovations and shifting perspectives are at the core of learning and education.

Although art teachers do not have all of the answers, we can offer our students the knowledge that has come before us. It is this knowledge we are entrusted to disseminate to the next generation so that they can continue the search for meaning and purpose in our human lives. The knowledge contained in any art curriculum is finite and therefore it has integral accountability, which is an essential part of our children’s education. It would be irresponsible to neglect everything that we have learned to the present and pass it off as meaningless. However, operating under the assumption that we are merely expected to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next is equally deficient.

In this thesis, I have explored why and how young children think the way they do and also the ways they express their thinking through their artwork. Most of the
educational resources that I have reviewed for this paper show a clear understanding of
preoperational learners’ unique thought processes, both in the past and the present as it
pertains to our educational system. It is only when we become absorbed by
accountability and overcome by rationality that we lose touch with our young artists’ true
talents. We are all responsible for ensuring the best education of our current and future
generations. We must continue with our educational efforts in the arts by honoring our
young student’s thought processes complete with unique perspectives, original ideas, and
a child’s size share of the liability. My analysis of young students’ artwork resulting
from the art lesson I developed and presented in this thesis further supports a greater
valuing of children’s preoperational thinking in elementary art instruction. In summary,
this thesis suggests elementary art teachers further honor our young students’ thought
processes and artistic creations and further utilize our young students’ authentic
approaches to artmaking to perpetually guide our elementary art instruction.
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APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS
Illustration 7
Illustration 11