

Moving out of domains and into BIG Ideas

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This new look at curriculum grew out of my work at Ohio State University in the department of Art Education. I began to investigate the development of curriculum to look at big broad themes, which could have life-long influence on students. Underlying assumption to this approach, which I call, Culturally

Responsive Curriculum are:

- Knowledge and understanding are shared constructions by teacher and students.
- Teachers need to create contexts and use strategies that recognize, appreciate and build on children's diverse perspectives, learning patterns and ways of communicating.

I have long been adopting a standards based integrated approach to instruction addressing choreographic concepts, movement elements, historical knowledge, dance making performance, movement analysis, dance description, and technology integration.

But when introducing the national dance standards to my ASU dance education students I was often found myself at grips with Dance Standard #5 which states, "Demonstrating and understanding dance in various cultures and historical periods."

I wondered... if as a result of my teaching dance students really understand the issues addressed? I began to seriously doubt whether I ever taught to bring about understanding rather I believe I encouraged them to merely become very much aware.

I can recall that on more than one occasion I complained that the standards should simply be re written ... then the inevitable happened ... one student asked, "How can we teach to bring about complex understanding... So I began this investigation to develop and teach and in such a way that would promote student Understanding.

Teaching for Understanding requires a big investment of time to get around the complexities of an idea to understand it. This, I believe was one of my main problem in the past... moving on too quickly, focusing on one cumulative dance making activity, eagerly moving forward.

In this investigation I have found it necessary to look hard at the curricula topic I was choosing. I found three essential ideas to be critical in this process and to bring about Understanding?

- Big Ideas
- Personal connections
- Problem solving activities in the media.

The First critical ingredient

Big Ideas: are ideas, which reflect important life issues and experience. They are broad and umbrella-like. They are characterized by complexity, ambiguity and contradictions. Demonstrated in several ways:

- Significance: this is essential that the concept be significant if the student's creation is going to be about the process rather than the product.
- Expand the Classroom: move the focus beyond technical skills toward conceptual concerns.
- Engage student's conceptual expression of ideas: because it is about the ideas rather than strictly the demonstration of the subject matter. (While not every students will be totally jazzed about every idea but the will be engaged in the process.
- Focus on instruction:

Examples: The interaction of nature and culture. The relationship between humans in community

The second critical ingredient

Personal connections: Act to situate the context of the issue within the student's working knowledge base. It is my belief that students must find personal relationships within the idea or it may just become a problem solving activity. To help personalize ideas the teacher must

- Connect to students prior knowledge
- Connect students past experience
- Students are encouraged to contemplate essential questions
- Q: How does this relate to my life?
- Q: Where am I in this idea?
- Q: What do I what to know?

Personal connection helps the student realize that the theme, which is ambiguous and full of contradictions, relates to themselves and their life.

The selection of the big idea is critical and must be personally relevant to the student's real life. An example If the teachers chooses to study the Big Idea of the environment, with a theme of acid rain which is prevalent in Canada is less relevant to students in Tempe AZ.) A better choice might issues of be urban sprawl or forest fires.

Student's answers to these critical questions guide their experience, and without them students remembrance may be too vague which tends to produce mimicry.

Personal connections provide passion, investment and knowledge however at times it can be a double-edged sword because personal connections may lead the students away from the big idea.

The third critical ingredient:

Problem solving in the media: Instructional strategies need to guide the students towards complex exploration and inquiry that encourages play. Play involves experimentation, breaking boundaries (within the atmosphere of seriousness). I believe that it is in this purposeful play that students can move an idea into a realization. Problem solving in the media is highly dependent on need for time, to question, to manipulate and try things out, take risks, searching and

experimenting while postpone conclusions. Time invested in problem solving while exploring big ideas can motivate the students to work in different ways while capitalizing on personal experiences.

- Time is devoted to exploration and play
- Lengthy experimentation: encourage students to risk
- Searching and Questioning
- Postponing final closure
- Reflecting

It is important to remember that issues of time often hinder this type of activity. Further, while engaged in the exploration of the media students need to be focused towards the specific objectives otherwise the experience will likely become too open ended and lead to confusion.

The curriculum: *Belonging and expressing community*

Big Idea: *relationships form community*

Personal connections:

What is a community?

Who is inside the community?

Who is outside the community?

If inside... then who is outside?

What does it require to belong?

Problem solving:

- Study outsider artists
- Adopted some of the art making strategies used by the outsider artists.
- Re-using found objects
- Collecting objects and artifacts which are meaningful
- Describing the meaning behind the object
- Having the description inform the dance making choices.
- Using found dance movements
- Interview community members (family members) listening to stories
- Having the stories and interviews inform the dance making choices

I became interested in the work of outsider artists because it was visually intriguing interesting and the wonderful stories about the artists. Self taught artists do not fit in the traditional American art history frameworks. These artists have no formal training but rather they demonstrate the internal need to express themselves in and through art.

ARTISTS

Lonney Holly: born and lives in Alabama, he is one of 27 children. His work is described as a tangled and beautiful mass of nature and assembled junk sculpture, which fill his garden. Holley create uses from others peoples trash. When he was young, Holly and his Mother would scavenge their neighborhood for castaway clothes for their family. This practice continued into and along the way Holley would sit down and with elder people in the community who shared their stories. His work celebrated the history of the neighborhood and the city as well. Holley Quote > read from PPP

Emery Blagdon: A fascinating artist. His work demonstrates rugged delicacy and crude complexity. Here is the detail of the hanging piece composed of wire, wood, plastic and metal. He constructs healing machines.

For Blagdon each of his structures contains electrical activity holding static charges that generate complex aura. He believes they have abilities to cure illness. In fact he gives treatments to the local population who celebrate their effects.

Leroy Pearson: roughly carved wood Pearson, chooses subject matter and media, from the natural world around his home.

Sister Gertrude Morgan: Her story is also fascinating. Not officially an ordained sister. She has at times been homeless and totally dependent on the kindness and support of others for food and shelter. Despite great adversity she faces life with great fortitude... guided by her faith.

Elijah Pierce chooses themes, which are part of his life. >read Quote >PPP

Edgar Tolson: chooses themes, which are part of his life.

Horace Pippin: work is more reflective his understanding of the social struggle in the south.