

The Value of Learning

During the years I have been teaching, I have come to view the learning process as an art in which a learner acquires knowledge and skills based on individually preferred aesthetic considerations. I hold a premise that such acquisition of knowledge begins with one's own self-realization, which is basis for building a sense of belonging to a society or cultural group. Thus, an understanding of one's own cultural heritage plays an essential role in the learning process. After learning begins, every bit of subsequent knowledge acquired thereafter integrates and synthesizes into existing and previously attained knowledge.

Although the process of knowledge acquisition may vary from one group of people to another, the quality of cultural, cross-cultural, and environmental interactions and experiences contribute to the quality of one's learned experiences in both formal and informal settings. Irrespective of one's social-cultural background, I believe that a collection of such life experiences provides a unique sense of direction and purpose toward a desired future. Personally, I have learned to appreciate cultural diversities that exist in the world today. My living in the United States for some years now has been a valuable learning experience that has given me multiple lenses with which to view the world. This learning experience has greatly expanded my ability to think intuitively and be creative.

I deem it important for student teachers to link theory and research in the field to the teaching-learning process. In so doing, student teachers will acquire new ideas and blend those ideas with their previous knowledge, and then experiment the new synthesis in a practical learning situation. Along with this strategy, I encourage the sharing of ideas, philosophies, and cultural experiences, and provide support to individual learners for synthesizing and personalizing knowledge. Personalized knowledge empowers an individual to be articulate, eloquent, and elaborate in expression of views and ideas, a quality toward which I seek to inspire my student teachers.

The Value of Teaching

My approaches to teaching focus on and encourage the learner to seek to understand knowledge from multiple contexts or perspectives because I view the learning process to be a highly and uniquely contextualized process. It is my personal belief that students should learn the fundamental subject matter in art and art education as well as engage in critical thinking, acquire life-long learning skills, and develop problem-solving strategies all of which I consider essential in a global culture. A mastery of content and pedagogical skills or even classroom management strategies are alone not sufficient to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment unless accompanied by an understanding of human needs and problem-solving strategies. I work with and encourage student teachers to question their assumptions constantly, and understand the context of every situation especially during

problem-solving moments. This strategy helps most of my student teachers raise their intellectual standards to become fair-minded thinkers who are aware of diversity among their learners.

Helping students raise their intellectual standards comes with challenges and complexities that I constantly handle by educating these future teachers to be intellectually and emotionally self-controlled, examine and re-examine their personal beliefs, and accept and treat multiple perspectives with respect. I exercise this myself and I am always careful of how I go about advising my students. For example, during a recent seminar, one of my student teachers looked at a 1996 artwork titled “Holy Virgin Mary” by artist Chris Ofili and exclaimed, “This is not the Virgin Mary mother of Jesus; I think the artist is insulting our religion!” I used this opportunity as a learning moment and after explaining that the student teacher’s reaction was normal and perhaps expected even in a classroom setting, I went ahead to give the artist’s background and context under which the artist created the artwork. The student teacher’s reaction afterwards was, “Aha! I see.” From my teaching experience, I have learned that those beliefs students or any other people take for granted could be and often are a hindrance to acquiring and understanding new knowledge and experiences. My role in the teaching-learning process is motivating student teachers to become critical thinkers who possess clear, accurate and relevant ideas and knowledge about art education.

Professional Growth

My research interests center on the impact of globalization on art, culture, and education and curriculum development for pre-service teacher education. I am always fascinated by the rich artistic heritages of the many cultures that I have interacted with or learned about, but sometimes disappointed by how little such heritage is incorporated into classroom instruction. In my research endeavors, I attempt creatively to include in my classroom instruction the artistic perspectives of multiple cultures. Likewise, I encourage my student teachers make lesson plans that provide a synthesis of multi-cultural perspectives.

I view achievement of learning to be a measure not only of the assessment of student teacher’s understanding of concepts, methodologies, and subject matter, but also the extent to which her/his teaching approaches incorporate the rich heritage of various cultures. I seek to measure a student teacher’s ability to solve problems in art education and the extent to which a teacher uses specific skills to solve such problems. Student teacher assessment gives me the opportunity to find out areas that need to be emphasized, establish appropriate strategies for various tasks, and detect ineffective strategies – all of which help me improve and build a repertoire of future teaching plans.