

Artful Thinking:
**Critical and Creative Thinking in Primary and
Secondary Visual Arts Education**

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Lastly, I would like to thank all the people who took part in the study. I am grateful for the sharing of their time and their thoughts. Without their cooperation and support this study would not have been possible.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Andrew whose love, advice and encouragement over the years has been so important to me achieving my goals.

Abstract

This study is an investigation into critical and creative thinking in visual arts education. It is often claimed that the development of critical and creative thinking amongst students is a central concern of arts education. Moreover, it is frequently assumed that critical and creative thinking result naturally from arts education because the discipline is innately creative. However, educational research suggests otherwise; namely, a more deliberate teacher-directed approach is required to foster these thinking skills amongst students. While a number of studies have highlighted the value of arts learning in promoting these kinds of higher order thinking skills, little has been documented about the educational approaches or strategies used to foster them. This thesis begins to fill this gap in the research by documenting perspectives and practices associated with critical and creative thinking in the visual arts classroom.

The study explores the perspectives and practices of four experienced and competent art teachers and their students. Specifically, ethnographic case study methods are used to gather, analyse and triangulate significant data. Four different cases – two in primary and two in secondary school – are included in the study. Data was collected through observation records and interviews with teachers and students in these case groups. Through field-based data collection and subsequent data analyses, a series of descriptive portraits are created that illustrate different pedagogical approaches to teaching critical and creative thinking through the visual arts. These portraits reflect teacher practitioners' theories and the value they ascribe to training critical and

creative thinking through art. In addition, they reflect the ways these teachers' theories and beliefs impact on education practices in their classrooms. While the four case studies could not possibly represent the realities of the broader field of art education, they are able to capture some of the diversity that exists in art teaching practices.

What this study demonstrates is that, while theoretical perspectives in art education research acknowledge the value of art in teaching higher order thinking, such an acknowledgement may be only marginally reflected in art classrooms today. Although the case studies examined in this project reveal some innovative approaches to expanding students' cognitive enquiry, these approaches are not part of an overall strategy designed to develop critical and creative thinking. Teachers frequently follow what appears to be fairly well established ways of teaching subject content and do not apply innovative measures to raise student levels of critical and creative thought. Teaching is largely focused on transferring art skills and knowledge rather than encouraging students to explore ideas. Furthermore, teachers seem to lack an awareness of when critical reflection does, or might, occur during learning tasks. These are significant findings that are relevant for policy makers, administrators, teachers and broader school communities.

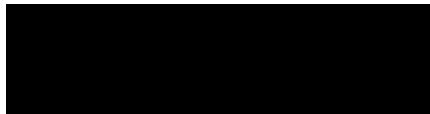
The thesis concludes by making a number of recommendations. These are practical recommendations that attempt to indicate general principles by which teachers might orient their visual arts teaching towards critical and creative thinking. Practical limitations of the classroom, such as scheduling restrictions and inadequate resources, naturally influence the feasibility of adopting such recommendations.

Nonetheless, the recommendations emphasise the need for a reassessment of the role of critical and creative thinking in visual arts education. Research that illustrates the value of focusing art teaching on critical and creative thinking while not diminishing the subject area requirements is still needed to persuade administrators and teachers of the ways in which Art represents an excellent mode of inquiry.

Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledge in this thesis.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Signature

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