

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
CAPTURING THE VOICES OF YOUNG ARTISTS**

By

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Summary Of Capstone Project

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Chair: Craig Roland
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Ideally, art education for young children supports the development of the cognitive and verbal skills necessary to appreciate, describe, and discuss artworks. Art and its processes provide an exciting avenue for conversation with children. For young children, mark-making and drawing are primary tools for communication, prior to learning symbols of letters and words (Jalongo, 1997). In an attentive atmosphere of casual investigation into a child's art-making activities, I encouraged children in my preschool classroom to "show and tell" their art and other creative endeavors. In doing so, children have gained an understanding that through art-making, they communicate ideas with pictures, along with their words.

In this study I have collected and analyzed field data based on listening and observing how children respond to art when lead by the teacher. Children can learn to think critically through seeing, investigating, and communicating about their art and the artwork of others in teacher-lead discussions. The implications of my project in the field of art education and early

childhood development are to further the evidence that engaging in classroom talk about art can help young children learn to communicate and realize their voice in and beyond art. I demonstrate how to use developmentally appropriate prompts and questions to engage children in caring conversations as they “read” their artwork aloud.

CHAPTER 1

In Their Own Words: Capturing the Voices of Young Artists

In many classrooms, art education in the early years of child development is primarily limited to making arts and crafts to develop kinesthetic skills (Diachenko, 2011). The general misunderstanding about art education, as it is offered in the public schools, is that art is something children make for fun or as a reward after the academic learning is finished. Art is generally accepted as something isolated and outside of academic learning. In reality, the world of art is integrated into all aspects of learning and life. As Sir Herbert Read said in 1966, “Art...is a way of education, not so much a subject to be taught as a method of teaching any and all subjects” (in Keel, 1969, p. 48).

Children are bombarded with images on a daily basis and yet our educational system doesn't provide them opportunities to respond to what they see in the popular culture. With the current trends in education in which success in school is based upon test scores in reading and math, art is one of many subjects that has been sidelined. This concerns me. In this environment, how will children learn to appreciate art? Will students find art important? How will society learn about the cultural and aesthetic aspects of life?

Children can learn to relate critically to the visual culture with guidance and conversation from a caring adult.

As I work with young children in an art-based pre-school, I observe children freely appreciating a variety of art and materials. As these children progress in painting, drawing and experimentation with materials, they begin to judge their work and compare it to others. This judgment is usually a reflection upon well-meaning adults and peers, and how they have

responded to the artwork. Compliments intended to bolster self-esteem of the child or to encourage representational drawing are commonly heard. I wonder: How do these verbal cues affect children's understanding of their work or of artwork in general? Can adults help to facilitate a child's understanding of art through questions that encourage interpretation rather than judgment? Will looking at and talking about art help them understand that art-making is a way to express their own ideas? For this study, I used qualitative action research to practice conversing with children about their art in an effort to foster their verbal and visual thinking skills.

Statement of the Problem

When art is treated as a reward, as a decoration, and solely as development of art techniques, art appreciation is neglected. These types of prescribed and pre-cut "art activities" leave little or no room for children's experimentation, imagination, critical thinking or self-expression. The product that they manufacture is hung on the wall in order to display or demonstrate their productivity and provide decoration to the room. There may be some interaction with the occasional passerby, but, generally, children's artwork is considered cute or interesting. It will be considered good when they "mature" and learn how to draw, or, so it seems.

I witness children in my pre-school classroom creating paintings and drawings everyday, which are hung beautifully and silently on the wall before being wadded up and shoved into their backpacks to take home. Do they value their mark-making? Who is taking an interest, supporting or confirming their experimentation or expression? In order for art to be appreciated an investigation and inquiry should occur with the child.

We live in a highly visual culture and children should question and think critically about the images that engulf their world. Children can begin these investigations with their own

creations—something personal, a piece of work that they have made. How can they learn to value this art as more than a piece of painted paper if they have no opportunity to talk to someone that models art language? In my experience, many teachers, parents and adults do not know how to respond to art or to a child’s creative work or process. Many believe creativity is a talent or a gift that you have or you don’t (Mulcahey, 2009). Art, for many, is a separate, foreign world filled with strange ideas and languages.

I believe that every child is creative and can learn to interpret art and its techniques. I also believe that every child has something to say about what they think and know of their world, regardless of their talent or skill in the practice of art-making. What verbal clues, encouraging words or questions can I, as their teacher, use with children to draw out dialogue and prompt their thinking and responses about their artwork? How can other caregivers and teachers learn to encourage preschool age children to talk about their art? How can this be accomplished in a non-judgmental manner? These questions are at the heart of this capstone project.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study has been to determine the best ways of incorporating thoughtful, open-ended questions and prompts into the curriculum for the young child in order to encourage caring conversations with children about their art. When teachers display students’ artwork in the classrooms or on gallery walls, the children recognize the decorative value that is inherent in their art. However, educators should go a step further with a discussion of the art. When working and speaking with children about their art it is important to remember that good art is more than the skill of drawing a direct likeness (Fineberg, 2006). Art expression and interpretation is just as valuable, if not more so, than the technical drawing skill of a direct likeness.

Responding to art involves investigating and relating the parts to the whole (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). As we look at artwork with children, we should point out specific colors, lines, shapes, patterns or figures. Children can learn to observe critically, notice details and think about how these “discovered parts” fit together to make a complete artistic expression. They can see how connecting curved lines and shapes together in the center can create a flower. This personal art investigation and response to art can also affect their art-making abilities, as they link their mark-making to language and expression.

In some cases I’ve witnessed how a child’s personal artwork can become more thoughtful, typically when the child understands that there is meaning or a story in their pictures. Language helps guide thought and action (Douglas, Schwarts & Taylor, 1981). This research demonstrates that young children are insightful, creative and can learn to use descriptive language when talking about their own and responding to the artworks of others. Calkins (1986) writes:

Our job is to respond to children’s products in such a way that youngsters learn that marks on the paper have the power to convey meaning. Just as infants learn the power of their gestures through our response to those gestures, language learners discover the power of their print and pictures through our response (p. 38).

CHAPTER 2

Supporting Literature

The Story in the Picture by Christine Mulcahey (2009) informed my study of fostering cognitive development and responses of young children looking at art. Dr. Mulcahey is a professor at the Rhode Island College and art specialist at the Henry Barnard Laboratory School where she teaches young children. Through her studies, and through her work with young children, she has written a book that enthusiastically supports the development of art programs that inspire communication and cognitive development by looking at and creating art. Her book offers guidance through the use of non-judgmental talking points, questions and verbal cues that educators can use in the classroom. This inquiry-based dialogue fosters knowledge construction, imagination, sharing, diversity, and appreciation (Mulchaey, 2009).

Mulchaey cites documentation from the classroom, extending learning and activities from the classroom to the home. In order to extend the learning, she offers advice to parents on how to look and respond to their child's artwork. This partnership can improve classroom participation, conversation, and inspire children to respond thoughtfully to their work. Mulchaey discovered, through her research, that young children are open-minded and that they don't generally criticize or disparage their peers' artwork.

We as educators should strive for this in our remarks to them. She cites constructive suggestions about the use of compliments. Adults are quick with affirmations when a child asks, "do you like my picture?" A compliment does not engage the child. Commenting on something specific or describing what they are working on provides information that the child can recognize. It also reflects engagement in their activity. "It's not important if *I* like their work, it's important that *they* like their picture" (Mulchaey, 2009, p 35).

The Relationship of Cognitive Style of Young Children and their Modes of Responding to Paintings, by Nancy Douglas, Julia Schwartz and Janet Taylor (1981) presents quantitative research used to examine behaviors and correlations of preschool age children and their responses to looking at selected artwork. Two categories of the Acuff & Sieber-Suppes Manual for coding children's responses to paintings were selected as being pertinent to the study (Douglas, Schwartz & Taylor, 1981). The findings of descriptive and interpretive scores were calculated from thirty preschool age children. Researchers selected three color reproductions of paintings and showed them to each child in a specific order. Questions and statements were posed. "Tell me everything that you see in this picture." More responses was elicited by, "What else?" and, "What do you think this picture is about?" (Douglas, et al., 1981, p.26)

Children's responses from interviews were collected, documented, and interpreted. The children identified literal objects such as a house or a violin depicted in the painting, yet they lacked knowledge of the qualities of the painting, "...not one of them mentioned materials or techniques—not even when viewing the original acrylic painting presented to them" (Douglas, et al., 1981, p. 29). Even though these students used a rich variety of art-making materials in their school, only rarely did they mention line, shape, color, or light within their descriptions. These findings reflect a lack of understanding at the conceptual level of art appreciation. "Since the preschool child is just beginning to learn this language system, and vocabulary is developing rapidly, that time would seem propitious to introduce simple art terms and beginning art understandings" (Douglas, et al., 1981, p. 24). This research demonstrates that children's cognitive styles of learning are unique, as are their viewing and interpretations.

As a child grows, he or she is more adept at description and communication when properly directed; therefore, art education should not deprive young children of aesthetic

learning. This formal assessment shows that children have not been guided to look at, think or respond to art. Although this study uses “unfamiliar” artwork to elicit responses, the findings do reflect a need for further investigation into children’s responses to art.

In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2004) provides insight into the atelier environment that supports creative learning through materials, relationships, investigation and communication. Reggio Emilia’s “*The Hundred Languages of Children*” are revealed within this framework of learning. One of the seventeen key concepts of this exhibition proclaims:

The old theories of separation give way to the educational theory of participation.

The relationships between the children and the adults – those of the school and those of the family – are consolidated through many forms of exchange and dialogue, and this leads to the shared elaboration of new educational experiences (Tarr, 2001, p.34).

Essentially, children do not learn in a solitary environment. “They learn by their unique investigative activities with the assistance of a guide who is actively and mindfully supportive in the continuing learning evolution” (Gandini, et al., 2004, p.52). Reggio Emilia’s philosophy informs my practice of actively engaging in conversations with children in addition to documenting and recording their responses. Likewise, a responsive family environment is also essential for optimal learning.

Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine, founders of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), also informs my teaching practice. Housen is a researcher in aesthetic development and VTS, which are used in educational programs in museums and schools around the world. The intended audience for these strategies is anyone who wishes to improve aesthetic development and the experience of looking at art, in addition to development of critical thinking skills.

The central theme of Housen and Yenaine's (2007) *Art Viewing and Aesthetic Development: Designing for the Viewer* is applied research of visual understanding in education. Through this research, five stages of Visual Thinking Strategies were developed that would help people experience visual art. Through each stage the learner is supported by Vygotsky's pedagogical scaffolds, which bridge current needs with newly-emerging questions and interests (Housen, 2007). The teacher encourages learners, through questions, "to discover new ways to find answers to their own questions, to construct meaning, to experience, and to reason about what they see" (Housen, 2007, p.14).

This theory of questioning can be used with pre-school children to elicit responses and build knowledge about their artwork. Although these strategies are used in conjunction with selected museum prints, the techniques can be easily transferred to looking at personal artwork. The VTS website (www.vtshome.org) gives examples of situations involving art dialogue with kindergarten students in a group within a structured, teacher-lead situation. In this example, the teacher models descriptive language when looking at art, and in doing so, coaxes the children to relate the words to what they observe, think, and interpret.

My approach to VTS was more informal with my students as I sought to listen and let them help guide the questioning when we talked about their art. Most of the artwork created by preschool children is "expressionistic" and requires the "artist" to describe, reflect, and verbally interpret the work. I used these facilitation techniques of paraphrasing comments neutrally, pointing at areas to be discussed, and linking comments and observations to engage the children (Housen, 2007).

Tollifson's (2011) *Enhancing Students' Responses to Art through Qualitative Language*, illustrates this teacher's belief that "teaching and learning in art is mediated to a large extent and

enhanced by language's qualitative characteristics" (p. 11). In a classroom setting, the teacher models the language on three major aesthetic components: form, media, and subject matter.

"The students become more attentive to the qualities of media, subject matter, and form as well as the ways of developing their own qualitative vocabularies for responding to works of art" (2011, p.12).

Gentle prompts help coax young students to respond. Group discussions are also useful to allow children an opportunity to hear different ideas and words from each another. I found that the use of comparisons and the searching for distinctions can encourage the students to be more specific in talking about artwork. "Does this line look heavy or light?" "Is Macy's picture more active than Jacob's?" By modeling qualitative language with pre-school children, I teach specific words that they can use when responding verbally to art.

The power of responding to visual images can inform their verbal language, personal expression of feelings, values, ideas, and imaginations. Tollifson's article informed my practice as a teacher who models descriptive language when talking and inquiring about art with children. As children examine and respond to their art, they will learn and "enhance their language with the use of adjectives, verbs, and adverbs that reflect the visual qualities of the works of art" (Tollifson, 2011, p.11).

Improving Student Dialogue About Art (2004) is an article by teaching artist/professor/author Terry Barrett which underscores the belief that "learning to interpret meanings of works of art is more valuable than learning to judge their value; artwork that is not interpreted is reduced to a mere object, and artworks do not speak for themselves: they carry multiple meanings and not fixed, single meanings" (p.87). Barrett submits a general set of prompts in logical progression when addressing and talking with students about art: thematic,

descriptive, interpretive, and judgmental. Facilitators must gain trust and respect from the students, and select developmentally-appropriate works that can have multiple interpretations. Trust, respect, interest and patience are crucial when wanting children to respond verbally. These strategies, in simplified, developmentally-appropriate language, are also useful when working with young children as they look at and respond to their own artwork. This article confirms my belief that art, as Barrett comments, “does not speak for itself (p. 86).”

CHAPTER 3

Research Design

This capstone project is a descriptive case study in which I explored the practice, in my classroom, of speaking with children about their art and art-making. Through art, children create meaning or stories based upon their imagination and knowledge, and learn to associate their marks and symbols with words.

The problem I see in early childhood learning practices is that teachers (and parents) tend to focus on learning the techniques of the art process and the product created, but not necessarily on the meaning constructed. If we limit the art experience to crafts, holiday decorations, and coloring pages, we mislead the students into believing that art is merely decorative. This doesn't give the child the freedom to be self-expressive. When children learn that their artworks contain information to be shared, they will seek to share it verbally as well as visually. "Verbal language is considered to be most useful in the context of viewing and reflecting on the art forms with the mediation of a teacher and peer group" (Schwartz & Douglas, 1975, p. 9).

Young children are curious and learn quickly. By using descriptive art terms that are modeled by the teacher, they can learn how to use specific words to describe what they see, feel, and think. The benefits will include students constructing their own knowledge, their appreciating of diversity, improved imagination in story-telling and the sharing of ideas, and improved critical thinking skills (Mulcahey, 2004). Children can learn to talk about their artwork like artists.

I conducted qualitative action research through observation and audio-recorded documentation of my teaching practices and conversations with children in my ArtStart

preschool classroom. After submitting the proper IRB forms to the University of Florida and receiving parent permissions from all fifteen children, I began my research.

Population

The children that were used for this study range in ages from three to five years and attend the half-day ArtStart preschool four days a week at the Parkersburg Art Center. I am one of the two teachers that provide a caring and safe learning environment with a curriculum that is rich in integrated art-making activities. The beauty of working with these young children is that they have not developed preconceived ideas about the meaning of art. Art-making, to them, is a fun way to explore media, learn skills and practice literacy. They have not yet begun to judge critically their art on merits of good or bad, right or wrong.

Implementation

The ArtStart curriculum is designed to learn the alphabet, science and math through art—Art through the A,B,C's. As the children are welcomed to class, an art activity is arranged for the children to work on until all the students have arrived. For example, if the letter of the day was "O" they would create a collage with a variety of orange objects. I sit down and coach the children on the process of gluing and cutting and arranging as I engage in conversation with them. Later on, during normal class activity of free play, the children can choose to paint at one of the three easels or work on another art project that was planned for the day.

For this research, I casually approached the children at the easel (or anywhere in the room) who were nearly finished with project in order to question their train of thought as they worked. Sometimes, I asked the children to share their finished artwork with the class—show and tell. Other times, I would take two or three children in the other art-room to work together on a special project. With my recording device on (iPhone[®]), and within a one to two foot

distance, I commented on their art and asked probing questions that encouraged them to see, think, and talk about their artwork.

The following list is an example of such prompts;

Can you tell me what you are drawing?

What are you making with this...ribbon, paint, wood...?

What do you see? Are there shapes, colors, or lines?

How did you get this vivid color or make this shape, etc....?

How many round shapes are in your picture?

How would you describe this to me if I had my eyes closed?

What does your image do?

Why did you decide to ...?

Tell me about how you made your art.

What do you see in your art that you like?

If you can make a story about this, what could it be?

What title will you give this? What in this picture makes you say that?

This open-ended form of inquiry provided an opportunity for the children to realize a creative and investigative relationship with their art-making. I adjusted my questions based on their responses. With young children, asking simple questions such as, “what colors did you use?” is appropriate. Beginning with simple, obvious observations, gives them confidence in their reply.



Figure 0-1

Marcia (Investigator) transcribes and records conversation

I digitally recorded and transcribed a number of conversations between all the children and myself in my classroom, both individually and in a small group. The collected voices were recorded through the SmartRecord and Voice memo applications on my Smartphone. These were later converted to an mp3 format, and then were edited using the Audacity program to produce two five-minute audio files of the children's voices. These audio recordings of the children's responses to their art are uploaded onto my website <http://marcialritchie.weebly.com/capstone-project.html> for public listening. I used these recordings to analyze our conversations and to transcribe narratives.

The final project will be interpreted with a gallery exhibition for friends and family of the ArtStart class at the end of the school year. This exhibit will include auditory recordings reflecting the children's responses to their art, texts, and artwork, as well as the verbal cues that initiated these responses.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Narratives

As I listened to the recordings of the children in my classroom, I identified specific types of responses. I listened for descriptions, interpretations or story, and feeling of emotion about and in the artwork. In addition, I also documented the type of situation or activity children were engaged. Some responses were elicited alone at the easel, some within a group activity at the table and some in a separate room. The responses reflected the child's visual literacy as well as communication skills, imagination, and personality.

Responding to children's artwork proved to be challenging. I had to restrain myself from judging the *look* of the work. No longer did I automatically exclaim "Oh, that's a beautiful flower!" Now, I thought, what if it wasn't a flower? It could be the child's mother. Rather than make my own judgment and assumptions, I deferred to the artist. "Could you tell me about this shape?" If it did not elicit a response, I pointed out what I saw and asked another question related to the work. It proved more effective to begin with questions that solicited simple descriptive responses before moving to interpretations. Even if the response was one word, it will be considered valuable to mention when reflecting on their artwork.

Preschool children have diverse learning styles, personality traits, social skills, and knowledge base. A child can be outgoing and talkative, or shy and uncomfortable during a conversation. Generally, the children (the names are fictional to preserve privacy) were comfortable talking to me, with the exception of Ava, who rarely says two words to anyone, and Jacob, who are both happy, yet seem to struggle or are more cautious in formulating the *right* words. The challenge was to find a way for these children to look at their art and tell me

something about it. I found it helpful to sit down and create art with these “quiet” children in a separate room, away from the noisy, hectic classroom.

Narrative 1



Figure 1-1. Ava, age 4



Figure 1-2. Claire, age 5

(Transcribed recorded dialogue with Ava and Claire.)

I discovered that Ava (age 4) responded the best when we worked together at a given task in a separate room with only one other student at the table. As Ava and Clair (age 5) chose pieces of scrap wood and other items to assemble a wooden sculpture, I inquired about their selections. Both girls gathered materials, assembled, and talked as I assisted with the hot glue gun. Ava directed my attention for gluing her pieces.

Marcia (The Investigator): What have you got there, Ava?

Ava: A bridge goes across here...*(She continued in a sing-song voice.)*
Don't stick it to the table.

Marcia: What shape do you have in your hand, there? Is it thick or thin?

Ava: It's thin. This goes right here, right here..it's hot. *(Ava discovered a curved piece of reed and looks at it.)* Me want the head band on! Me want the head band on right here. *(Hummed to herself, as she picks up a marble.)* The green one goes right there.

Marcia: What other colors do you have?

Ava: Orange, o'ang, o'ang... I want this right here! *(She counted and lined up five*

marbles.)

Marcia: What colors do you have there?

Ava: White, green, blue, and white and y-loow, and blue and orange and green and green and green and y-llow and blue and orange and green and y-llow and that's all, that's all, that's all...me wants some more, hey can you turn it around a little bit? (*She continued to sing, as she picked up a thin, curved shape of wood.*) Add some more, add some more, we got'a do a moon, we got a moon. (Ava's was experimented with the sound of her voice as she changed her pitch.)

Marcia: What would you call that shape?

Ava: A door. (*She continued to chant and sing to herself.*) Here it is, here it is..., put this on top of this!

Marcia: What are you going to call this?

Ava: A-V-A, all done!

This conversation, as Clair and Ava and I worked together, was successful in giving Ava a more comfortable situation to express herself verbally without the distractions of the classroom noise and activity. This was the first time she spoke with more than one word. Generally, Ava uses nonverbal looks and clues and a single word to get what she wants.

Throughout this assembling activity, Clair was also talking about each piece she found and its purpose on her structure. It was a challenge to listen and respond to both girls while gluing their projects. Thankfully, I didn't have to encourage or prompt Clair to respond. Her words flowed and were primarily interpretive.

Claire: Put this right here, it's a hamburger.

Marcia: I questioned her, it's a hamburger? (*I thought it looked like a hotdog.*)

Claire: It's not a real hamburger, it's a sign. (*Clair continued to assemble and asked me to glue her pieces.*) That's the room that will help the passengers get off the boat, that's so they can go outside, but they have to go downstairs inside the boat to go out, to keep them dry, and I have a coin. (*She picked up another wooden shape.*) I got this, it's a cottage, and it's not a cottage from snow white, it's the other one, the cottage in the *Black Cauldron*, with three witches living inside, but this is actually a boat instead of a cottage, I have a book on it. Can you glue it right there? This is something that would help it, if it needs help; it has lots of tools on it. Are you glad I got that? How 'bout we glue on these gem stones? Put it across, right here, it will power the engine and these have minerals that help it. This goes over here to help that to get all its energy to help it. If it runs out, the sun will help it.

Each object she picked up seemed to trigger yet another thought in her monologue.

Marcia: What's this shape right here?

Claire: A horizontal line.

Marcia: It is a horizontal line.

Claire: I want this stacked up. I'm making something for a Monarch to sit on if it's windy. We're making a trophy boat. That's not a ship that floats on the water. I'm done with it. Are you glad I did this?

Marcia: Are you glad?

Claire: I am.

Claire has rarely been hesitant or shy about talking. Her knowledge is extensive for a five year old and her use of descriptions and stories are prolific. It was beneficial for Ava to hear Claire's imagination through words.

Narrative 2



Figure 2-1.

(Transcribed recorded dialogue with Claire)

There were many instances that Claire created stories in the classroom depending on themes or a passing thought she had. One day, Claire was talking, out loud to anyone that would listen, about a mouse and a pizza. I suggested that she draw a picture of her story. While she finished her drawing, I asked her to tell me about it.

- Claire: This is a pipe and the water travels from here to here and the mouse got stuck behind it.
- Marcia: It got stuck behind what?
- Claire: The mouse and the pizza.
- Marcia: What's the shape of your pizza?
- Claire: A triangle and a loop.
- Marcia: Tell me about this shape right here.
- Claire: It's a mystery!
- Marcia: It looks like a question mark, is that what it is? You are busy coloring aren't you?
- Claire: Yea, I have to finish it or Ms. Jessie won't believe me and think one of us put it in there, she believes me though, but...
- Marcia: What are you coloring right now?
- Claire: That's actually a rat.
- Marcia: Oh, I see, it's got teeth.
- Claire: It's a rat. There was once a mouse in my house.
- Marcia: What's this shape right here that goes up and down?
- Claire: It is something that gets all the water from the rain and puts it in here, see i goes there, but, this is what happen; First, the first time the rat went there, the first time that I say, the last time it was all full of rats. Have you ever saw a rat? (*Clair continues to color her rat black.*) It went through the red door up here, and then it went into this place, and went, down, down, to here and put the pizza in, and then the water got stuck, those are the waters and they got stuck behind the rats and pizza and they couldn't get out. That's what happened so we have to save that rat.
- Marcia: Oh, my, that's interesting; tell me about these shapes down here.
- Claire: Those are sinks. It's the title called the Pizza Got Stuck. (*Claire walked away.*)

Besides inventing stories, Claire likes to draw, label, and create signs for the classroom that reflect her imagination. Her use of descriptive language revealed her knowledge and verbal skills.

Narrative 3

(Transcribed recorded dialogue with Johnny)

As I paint along with the children, I speak of the specific colors I use and how to draw shapes with lines and paint. Modeling artistic behavior as well as descriptive language is a step in word recognition associated with images. I asked, "What kind of line are you making?" Johnny (age 4) answers, "Monster lines!" "Why are they monster lines?" I wondered. Johnny

replied, “I don’t know.” I asked, “What color are they?” Johnny looked at his picture and pointed, “Kind of purple, green, black, and brown... that’s all...” Then I asked, “Are they straight lines or wiggly lines?” He responded, “wiggly lines!” I continued, “Do they go horizontally, vertically, diagonally, up, down,... Which way do they go?” “Upside-down!” he proclaims. During this conversation, I used too many unfamiliar terms, so he found his own way of describing a line.

Narrative 4



Figure 4-1.

(Transcribed recorded dialogue with Abby.)

The first child I began to talk with about their painting during class was Abby (age 4). She likes to paint and was always at the easel, painting, during free time. She enjoys mixing colors and painting “pretty” pictures. She would always say, “Do you like my picture?” Of course, I liked her colorful pictures. But, I wanted to know more and I wanted her to think about

her picture. So, I directed the inquiry back to her. This is a ten minute dialogue occurred during which Abby painted four paintings.

Marcia: Look at all the colors that you used, could you tell me about this?

Abby: Look! I mixed two colors to make green!

Marcia: (I pointed to the green.) This is...?

Abby: The grass!

Marcia: Tell me about these blue shapes right here.

Abby: That's my family, that's mommy, that's Izzy, that's me, and that's daddy! Isn't that pretty, it's a blue sky. You can mix two colors to make-green! If you use yellow and blue...it makes dark green! And you can paint even over it. Do you know what that is up there?

Marcia: Tell, me.

Abby: It's the sun! (*she finished this painting and begins another*) Now do you know what I'm making? (*pause*) It's my room!

Marcia: Your room is pink? What else is in your room?

Abby: Do you know what I most of all like?

Marcia: Tell me.

Abby: It is my favorite. It is a Youwho, I like Youwhos, I have, like, a ton of them!"

Marcia: Tell me, what is a Youwho?

Abby: It's my unicorn. I'll show you one. (*She started another painting.*) It is something.., it's a little stuffed animal and some of them are beanie boos, the beanie boos don't make noise, but the Youwho's do. Well, Santa Claus brought me like a really giant one! (*She pointed to the picture*) That one's my unicorn Youwho, it's a little one, I'll show you what it looks like. (*She finished with this one and began another painting.*)

Abby: (*Singing and painting*) splat, splat, slippity, splat, splat, splat, slippity, splat.....red, red, red, this is a turkey at the bottom...up at his tail..." (*Called out.*) I think I need a different paint brush.

Marcia: Why?

Abby: Because, this is kind of tough. (*She pushes the brush up and down.*)

Marcia: Do you want a softer or harder brush?"

Abby: Softer.

I retrieve a watercolor brush for her. Then Abby also requested brown paint and yet another smaller paint brush. She thoughtfully remembered what her Beanie Boo turkey looked like as she mixed paint in order to achieve the brown and orange for the feet. She was using her prior knowledge to reconstruct the image of her toy. She was painting from memory.



Figure 4-2. Abby's Turkey painting.

Abby: It has a brown belly and has a red waddle. How do you make brown?
I think we need to put little feet, It needs little feet...now....let me think, oh, I remember, it was a brown face, and ahh, let me remember what color, lets just make this any color, I remember the side was black. All of these, inside the little circle inside the color right here was black. How are we going to make black? I'm making this for my turkey beanie boo.

This is an example of how thinking can direct the action of painting and vice versa. Abby thought about her family. The idea of her family led her to think of her home and bedroom. While thinking about her pink bedroom, she remembered her “favorite thing” that she painted a picture of.

Children paint what they know and like. Even as I stepped away, Abby's happy attitude was reflected in her singing as she painted. She used her imagination, listened to my questions, responded clearly and coherently, made decisions, found solutions, described the content of her work, made special comparisons, shared her thoughts, recalled data, asked questions and learned about mixing and paint application. This conversation required listening and observation on both

our parts and my careful consideration of words. The next day she brought in the Turkey Boo to show me.

Abby continues to enjoy painting and drawing. Her drawings are becoming more realistic as she critically thinks about her work.



Figure 4-3. Abby, age 4.

Narrative 5



Figure 5-1. Liam's Dinosaur painting

(Transcribed recorded dialogue with Liam and Ethan)

I also look for an opportunity to talk to some of the “active” children about art that normally don’t spend much time creating on paper. Occasionally, I point out a piece of artwork that has been hanging on the wall from the previous day. On this occasion, during snack time, I held up a painting of (what looked like to me) a dinosaur. I sat down with Liam (age 5) as talked to the class. His friend Ethan (age 5) is standing nearby.

- Marcia: Who painted this?
 Liam: I did.
 Marcia: Would you like to tell the class about your painting?
 Liam: Sure, it’s about a dinosaur.
 Marcia: What color is your dinosaur?
 Liam: It’s red, blue, and yellow.
 Marcia: Tell us about the shapes.
 Liam: This one is a triangle, and this one is a triangle, too.
 Marcia: How about this white space in the middle?
 Liam: That’s his controllers, it’s a robot dinosaur.
 Marcia: A robot dinosaur? How does he move?
 Liam: He moves with his robot legs.
 Ethan: You need robot feet! *(Interrupting)*
 Marcia: Tell me about these yellow lines.
 Liam: It’s for his body, for his face.
 Marcia: I see that you have three blue spots right here.
 Liam: Those are his spikes.
 Marcia: Is he a nice dinosaur?
 Liam: No, he’s a...he’s is a ... yea, he’s a nice dinosaur.
 Ethan: He’s a mean dinosaur! *(Interrupting again)*
 Marcia: Ethan thinks he’s a mean dinosaur.
 Liam: Yes, that’s what I was going to say. *(He paused)* I know what a dinosaur looks like.
 Marcia: How do you know what a dinosaur looks like?
 Liam: ‘Cause, because a dinosaur movie and it has a t-rex in it!
 Ethan: I know about dinosaurs too! *(Interrupting)*
 Marcia: How do you know about them, Ethan?
 Ethan: I saw a dinosaur before, on Bubble Guppies. *(Interrupting)*
 Marcia: Is that a TV show?
 Liam: That’s what I was saying!
 Marcia: Are they this color? *(Pointing to the picture.)*
 Liam: They’re different colors. This one has no shirt on, and this is where his spike is.
 Marcia: How did you make these colors?
 Liam: I used paint.

Marcia: With your fingers?

Liam: No, with a paint brush. I really did it with three brushes; I didn't want to mix them up.

Marcia: I see that the colors are separate."

Marcia: Liam, what should I do with this picture?

Liam: You should put it...you should frame it.

This conversation with Liam and Ethan exhibited responses that were descriptive as well as interpretive. Liam thought and spoke about the concept of the painting that included: color, line, shape and the "mood" of his dinosaur. He also knows what to do with a painting. "You should frame it."

After Liam finished describing his painting, Jenna and Macy also wanted to tell the class about their artwork. When given an opportunity, children want to be in the "spotlight" with undivided attention from the class and the teachers to share what they know.

CHAPTER 5

Summary of Findings

I have found that many adults view and respond to children's art as a "nice picture" to be admired and complemented for a "job well done." In addition to admiration, I have also heard this disheartening question, "What is that supposed to be?" This question denotes judgment and tells the artist that you are either ill-informed, can't see, or that it's a bad painting. We as adults can learn to look at children's art in a non-judgmental manner and identify what is there—such as a color, shape, line, pattern or texture. We should not assume to know that shapes presented in a picture represent people or animals. It could be a robot dinosaur. In order to hear a meaningful response from children, my advice is to first inquire, "Tell me about your picture." This will focus their observation skills and thinking. Parents and other caregivers can use similar questions to find out what the children are expressing in their art. I have found that by reserving personal judgment, I encouraged children to express and create for themselves not for my pleasure and conformation.

As I discovered in my study with these particular children, the use of simple encouraging prompts such as, "Tell me about the colors you used," can inspire the student to think about the painting process as well as the content. Abby said, "I used two colors to make green!" Liam replied, "I used a paint brush, I really did it with three brushes and I didn't want to mix them up."

The question, "Tell me something about your picture," produced descriptive and imaginative responses from most children in my classroom. As reflected in the narratives, Abby described how she mixed paint, the blue figures represented her family, the pink paint was the color of her room, and her favorite toy is a Beanie Baby. Children also began to realize that their pictures, constructions, and arrangements contained stories—whether they were

immediately/clearly visible to the viewer or not. A realistic drawing or illustration was not as important as the story that developed out of it.

Some children such as Claire didn't need to be prompted into conversation; she offered stories and commentary throughout the day. As I gave her my attention and listened, I asked probing questions which helped Claire to think and clarify her thoughts. She then proceeded to draw and color a picture of her story. Claire illustrated her story of the "Mouse and the Pizza" in order to tell/show it to her teacher Miss Jessie.

I found, that in some situations, when asked, "Would you tell the class about your painting?" that it was too broad or vague a question for some children; therefore, finding something specific to talk about is a good starting point. "Tell us about these shapes you painted." Once the dialogue commenced, and as I listened, more content was revealed to which I inquired further. The key is to listen and ask appropriate non-judgmental questions, without making suppositions about their art but with genuine interest. "Tell me about these blue spots right here," and "that's interesting, tell me about that figure?" I found that using questions that reflect art content is a starting point in which to draw out dialogue and encourage reflection, thinking and verbal responses.

I discovered that the context in which conversations take place has shown to be a factor in a child's responses. Ava, the child who rarely speaks, was quite animated with her responses when we worked on a sculpture project in another room, away from the distractions of the busy classroom. As she picked wooden pieces for her sculpture, I asked, "What have you got there, Ava?" She looked at the shape and replied, "A bridge, it goes across here,..it goes right here." Normally, her answers would be a nod, or one word. But, by changing the situation, I

successfully recorded ten minutes of conversation with Ava as she assembled her sculpture and described the colors and shapes she found.

I have also found that age was not a defining factor in this class in the type of responses given. The youngest boy in the class surprised me with the attention to detail in his replies. While building a city with Legos, he described the “sea monkeys” who lived there, what they did, how they talked and their tiny size. This young three year old boy was just as imaginative and descriptive as a five year old boy when talking about his buildings.

I now realize that children in my classroom enjoyed looking at and talking about their artwork. Some were more verbal, imaginative, and descriptive than others, depending on their individual stage of development. They were also interested in listening to their peers talk about their own art. Even the children who are quiet, with a limited vocabulary, or who are not inclined to sit and paint or draw, discussed their creations when given the opportunity of undivided attention and gentle prompts. By responding to my prompts I believe that children realized that their art-making is an avenue to communicate or share their thoughts and ideas—through a picture.

As a result of this project, I have modified my teaching practice to include open-ended, specific, and descriptive questions when talking and asking about children’s art. I do not assume to know what they are creating until I inquire. From now on, whether I am reading aloud, looking at pictures, experimenting with science, or building with blocks, I will use and model a more qualitative language as I look, reflect, and respond upon a child’s creation. I believe that the children know that I am interested in listening and hearing about their art rather than judging it. It is my advice that it is the responsibility of the caring adult to inquire, listen, give attention, and significance to children’s creations.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout this project I did not presume to think that all children can or will verbally express their thoughts for my convenience. Timing and patience are critical when approaching children at their play or “work.” Depending upon the situation or on the context in which a child is asked to respond, he or she can easily refuse and be uncooperative. “I don’t feel like talking right now,” is the reply I received when I asked a young girl to tell me about the picture she had made the previous day.

Preschool children have a wide range of developed verbal abilities and some may not be able to express their thoughts with words. With this in mind, I had to be inventive to capture even the quiet pre-verbal children’s voices, which can be quite difficult in a noisy classroom.

In order for me to be as unobtrusive as possible I did not use a hand-held microphone. By using the internal recording device on my Smartphone, I had to hold it within one to two feet of their faces, and in a casual manner. As children talk, they move about and sometimes wander away. Some sound files had to be reformatted and adjusted to achieve clarity and amplification. The study may not be all-encompassing and is limited to this small sample of the classroom students in this specific preschool of fifteen students.

Questions for Further Study

By learning to see, reflect and respond to their artwork, will the children transfer and build on this knowledge to include other art forms? I would be interested in hearing if they use the same descriptive responses during a gallery tour.

As the children continue to respond and talk about their work, will they be more thoughtful in their art-making? Will the parents learn to see, inquire and respond to their children's artwork with a greater interest?

APPENDIX**Consent Form**

Dear _____ (pre-school parent),

I am a graduate student in the Department of Art Education at the University of Florida. In association with Jessie Siefert, the director/teacher of ArtStart preschool, and as your child's teacher, I will be conducting research on teaching strategies in which your child learns literacy through their art and mark-making practice.

I intend to document and record conversations that occur with your child about their art and art-making. This data will result in a public exhibition of their art in association with their words and conversations from class.

The results of this study may help the community of educators, researchers and parents to better understand how the arts can foster literacy (written and verbal communication skills) and can also be beneficial in aesthetic, social and cognitive learning.

The results of this study will be reflected in the group exhibition in March – April, 2012 (date to be determined by Parkersburg Art Center director Abby Hayhurst).

You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or financial benefits. No compensation is offered for participation. The use of your child's first name will be used or omitted upon consent.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at 304-532-1900 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Craig Roland at 352-391-9165. Questions or concerns about your rights as research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Marcia L. Ritchie

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child

_____, to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this description.

Parent / Guardian Date

Lead Teacher / Witness Date

UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research

Protocol Submission Form

This form must be typed. Send this form and the supporting documents to IRB02, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611. Should you have questions about completing this form, call 352-392-0433.

Title of Protocol:	Observation of Children in a classroom setting		
Principal Investigator:	Marcia Ritchie		UFID #: 1625-8165
Degree / Title:	Master of Art Education	Mailing Address: 11 2 nd Avenue Ravenswood, WV 26164	Email: Marciart.61@gmail.com
Department:	Art Education U.F. School of Art + Art History		Telephone #: 304-273-3522
Co-Investigator(s):	N/A	UFID#:	Email:
Supervisor (If PI is student):	Dr. Craig Roland		UFID#:
Degree / Title:	Associate Professor	Mailing Address: (If on campus include PO Box address): P.O. Box 115801, Gainesville, FL 32611-5801	Email : rolandc@ufl.edu
Department:	Director of Online MA Program in Art Education		Telephone #: 352-391-9165
Date of Proposed Research:	January – March 2012 Spring A (independent study)		
Source of Funding (A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):	N/A		
Scientific Purpose of the Study: To investigate best teaching practices in order to conduct conversations with children about their art and mark-making activities in a classroom setting.			

Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language:					
The participants in my regular class will be observed and will be asked general questions about their art work. The dialogue will be documented and digitally recorded. Photographs may be taken of students and their work.					
Describe Potential Benefits: The children will develop conversational skills with adults and peers. They will understand that they create meaning through story and dialogue with their artwork.					
Describe Potential Risks: <i>(If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)</i>					
No risk will be involved.					
Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited: Permission consent forms will be required from parents of the children in my pre-school class. This will determine participation.					
Maximum Number of Participants (to be approached with consent)	15 students	Age Range of Participants:	3-5 years	Amount of Compensation/ course credit:	N/A
Describe the Informed Consent Process. (Attach a Copy of the Informed Consent Document. See http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/samples.html for examples of consent.)					
Prior to presentation of the consent forms to parents of the preschool children that I teach, I will explain my intention of research through daily teaching and conversations with their children. This action research will result in a final exhibition that will include their children’s artwork, photographs and words.					
(SIGNATURE SECTION)					
Principal Investigator(s) Signature:					Date:
Co-Investigator(s) Signature(s):					Date:
Supervisor’s Signature (if PI is a student):					Date:
Department Chair Signature:					Date:

Biographical Sketch

Since 2006, Marcia Ritchie has taught Art Start Preschool at the Parkersburg Art Center (PAC) in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Her work at PAC includes developing community art education programs and outreach, membership, fundraising and web communication systems. Her life experiences of raising three children, substitute art teaching at Jackson County Schools (K-12), coaching, volunteering, and painting, all contribute to an appreciation of the diverse ways different children learn.

Marcia is a member of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) and the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC.) Her education includes a BA in Art and Theatre from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Upon completion of the Masters of Art Education from University of Florida, Marcia intends to continue to teach at PAC and advocate for arts in the community and the early elementary classroom.

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