

Student Teachers Tell Their Stories of Curriculum Development

BY DEBORAH KUSTER, KATHRYN O'NEAL, AND AMBER GOOCH



As the student teacher supervisor in a public university in the mid-South, I have the privilege of witnessing my students making the transition from student to art teacher. When an accomplished teacher-mentor says that an intern “gets it,” I know that this intern has demonstrated an understanding of the most important skills, traits, and knowledge needed to become an effective teacher.

I invited co-authors Katy O’Neal and Amber Gooch to write this article with me because they are novice teachers who “got it” during their internship in the spring semester of 2007. This article includes Katy’s and Amber’s narration of their personal pilgrimages into becoming teachers and my commentary as a supervisor in their process of developing and teaching their art curriculum units. We will explore the following questions:

- What factors most influenced the curriculum design choices?
- What were the key components of each unit?
- What implications can be made for teacher education programs?

Curriculum and Novice Teachers

When evaluating a teacher candidate’s curriculum design, I assess the candidate’s ability to: (1) demonstrate knowledge of students’ background, interests, and exceptionalities; (2) select learning goals that are appropriate for students; (3) connect lessons to past and future learning; and (4) extend student thinking. According to several contemporary art educators (Popovich, 2006; Roberts, 2005; Stewart & Walker, 2005; Walker, 2001; Walling, 2006), artistic skills should be integrated into lessons that center on ideas, issues, or concerns that connect to students’ lives and to their past and future learning. As a student teacher supervisor, I emphasize that effective curriculum in visual art is relevant to students’ lives and engages them in critical and creative thinking. Art lessons designed simply to teach a skill or apply elements and principles no longer suffice.

Research shows that generally novice teachers (including art educators) plan simplistic instructional experiences that lack interconnectedness and rely on published curricular materials. Very often novice teachers include only the lowest cognitive skills in their lessons, with only a small percent of lesson objectives designed to develop higher order thinking skills (Kowalchuk, 1997; Sultana & Klecker, 1999; Torff, 2003). These findings give weight to the need for an examination of exemplary curricular units developed by novice teachers as a means to understand ways to better prepare and equip them to achieve with more authentic, challenging lesson planning and implementation.



Examples of students’ gesture drawings meant to capture the essence of student models’ poses.

I found myself in a technological society dedicated to numerical specifics which ignored personal attachments.

■ **Katy**

Paul Gauguin believed that industrialized, Western civilization was spiritually empty, forcing society to seek material gain and neglect emotions. Therefore, he left Paris in 1886 to live among the peasants of Brittany at Pont-Aven in western France (Janson & Janson, 2003). Though my own journey did not originate from my society's perceived failure or neglect, like Paul Gauguin, I set out for Pont-Aven seeking a community centered around artmaking. The summer after my sophomore year in college I participated in a 4-week art workshop titled "Experimental Works on Paper," described as a time for students to "immerse themselves in the unique environment of Brittany and to use the experience of being in another culture and having a different sense of place to create new visual problems and solutions and to explore a variety of nontraditional techniques" (www.pontavena.org). Some of the nontraditional techniques involved site-specific installations, using found materials, wax from the local beekeeper, dyes made from local plants, and stains

from local dirt. The resulting artworks were personal to the individuals, but often reflected the class' collective experiences.

After returning home, I did not make artwork dealing with conceptions of *place* for several months. However, early one morning while eating breakfast by my favorite window spot, my thoughts drifted to online directions such as MapQuest and the Global Positioning System (GPS). I realized then that although this exact spot had GPS coordinates, there was a dissonance between its scientific location and its meaning to me. How could anyone, upon viewing geographic coordinates, understand that this was the spot I ate off-brand Cheerios® nearly every weekday morning? I wondered about which strategies would render this place meaningful to others. I noted a parallel to Gauguin's industrial society dedicated to material gain, as I found myself in a technological society dedicated to numerical specifics which ignored personal attachments.

Later in the week I was at the library and found a book about Robert Rauschenberg's overseas cultural interchange (ROCI) work.

As I went through it, I felt a kinship when he discussed an idea he had while in college—to photograph every square foot of the United States. To me, Rauschenberg's idea bridged the gap between the impersonal mathematical precision of the global positioning systems and the details and specifics that give a place its personality. I found the solution to my "GPS vs. Reality" dilemma from breakfast! And it was just as impossible for me as for the collegiate Rauschenberg.

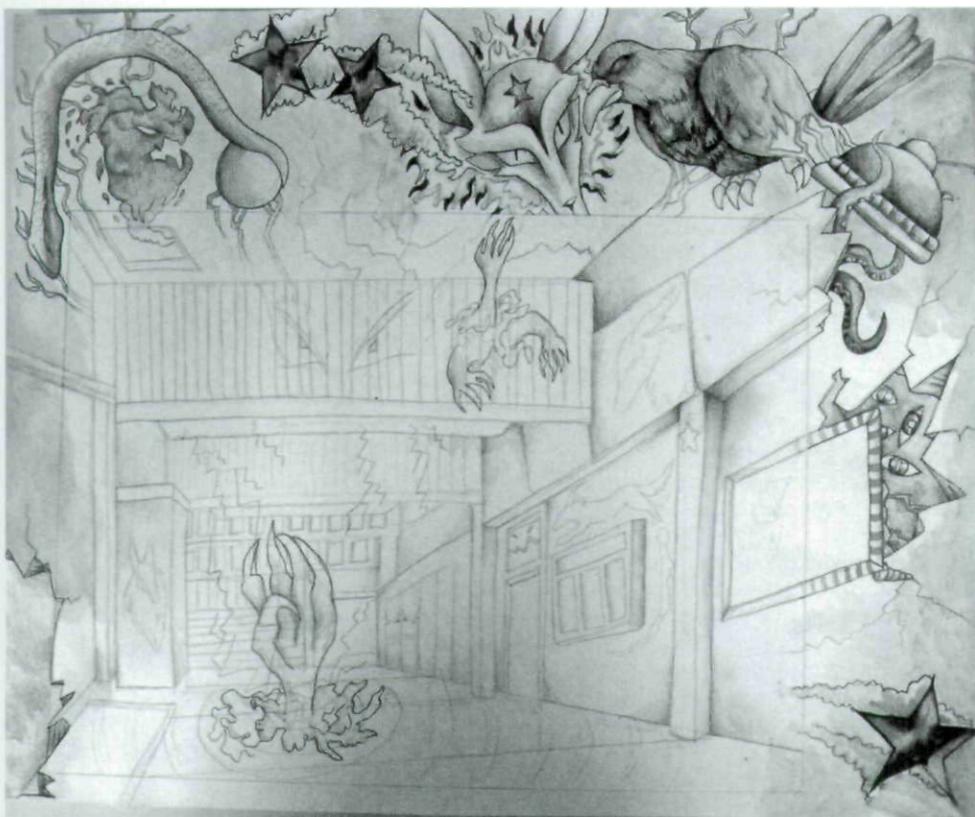
I wanted to explore the idea of giving definition and a new experience of a place to viewers in my artwork. In addition to Rauschenberg, I was influenced by Cristo and Jean-Claude and Joseph Cornell. From Cristo and Jean-Claude I focused on the transformation of the familiar into the fantastic. Cornell's intimate enclosures—simple glass-fronted boxes—create their own space and place, separate from the rest of the world. Rauschenberg traveled the globe and created artwork about his experiences, sharing them to promote cultural understanding.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **A Place: How It Looks, How It Feels.** My unit was designed for a high school Drawing I class. My teacher-mentor's lesson, prior to this unit, focused on one-point perspective in charcoal and monochromatic acrylic washes, creating a surreal setting using symbolism to personalize the space. My instructional unit about *place* built on the skills of drawing realistic objects in a space from observation, and communicating personal experiences to viewers.

Designing for a high school curriculum revolving around *place*, I chose to focus on Rauschenberg because his idea involved communicating about a place, rather than simply creating or transforming one. I wanted to create among the students a sense of community through a place, just as I had experienced in Pont-Aven.

To begin the unit, I showed students the GPS coordinates for the location of the classroom. I had them guess what the numbers meant, and then asked them to identify them. I introduced my reflections of how GPS coordinates are a specific way of describing a location, but are not descriptive or evocative. I showed slides of Rauschenberg's work and questioned students about its form and content. I considered the idea driving the artwork to be the most important element, but practical concerns needed to be attended to as well. Designing the instructional activities, I considered that observational drawing of buildings (interiors and exteriors) would extend their knowledge of perspective. After introducing the technique of measuring the angle of orthogonal lines and measuring proportions with a pencil, the class moved to its out-of-classroom location. I asked students to select a location within a set perimeter (within sight of the teachers) that best represented their personal experiences or viewpoints of the school.

Students began by sectioning off part of their paper for the observational drawing, leaving a blank border for later. For the observational period students were limited to graphite pencil. I was surprised that the students expressed so much enthusiasm about a drawing assignment that is generally considered basic and academic. Several students who struggled previously were very successful. Next, in the remaining border around the observational drawing, students chose imagery that conveyed their experience at school in a precise way. Students selected at least three images,



Lauren Hansen surrounded her drawing of the hallway with a fantasy world.



Samonté Wesley's drawing of where he ate lunch.

including the symbolic, narrative, or abstract, to communicate their experiences and refined them with colored pencil or collaged papers. Five lines of the observational drawing were extended into the border imagery to begin unifying the drawing. As part of the unifying process, I limited their palette to three colors of colored pencil.

In addition to the artmaking techniques and skills covered in this lesson, I wanted to place the students in a position to communicate knowledge of themselves and their experiences at school. High school students long to communicate their thoughts and feelings to others and to be understood.

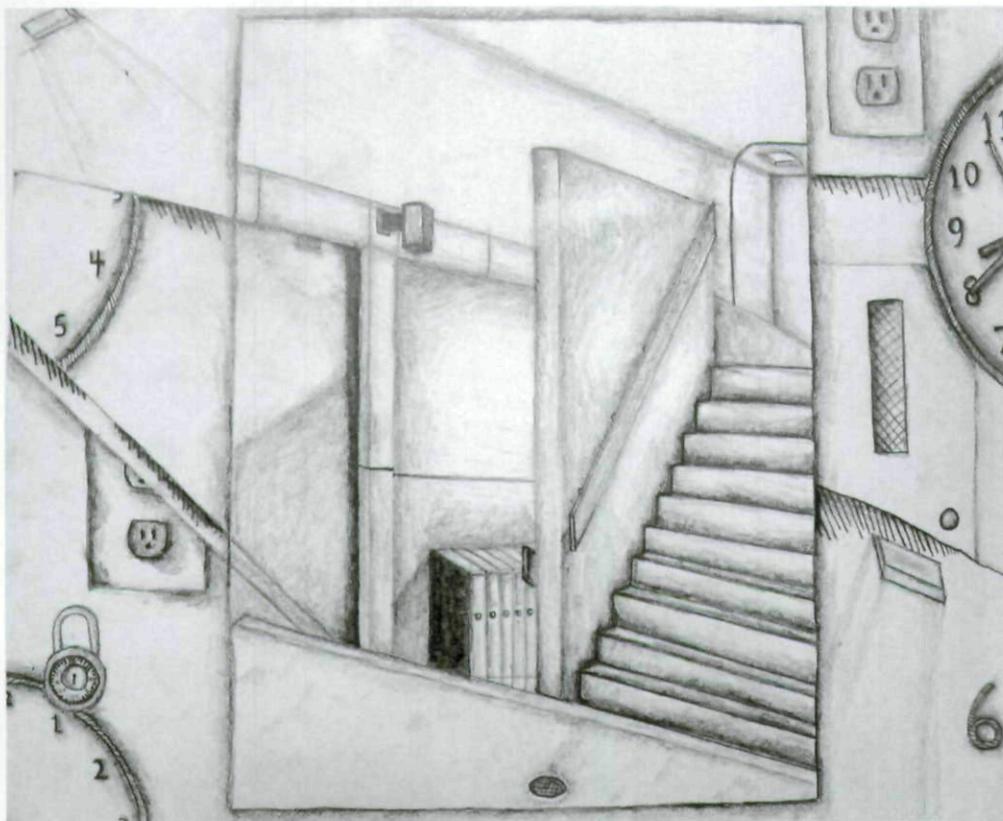
I led a critique of the finished drawing, the first one for this group, which explored the communicative aspect of their work. In some cases, students who did not know each other's names were touched by their similar experiences. I felt that the success of this lesson did not lay in the execution of new skills, although this was an important focus, but in using their art to bridge cultural, geographic, and personal differences and promote understanding in their classroom-community.

■ Amber

The idea of essence came to me while I was trying to write high school art lessons that conveyed meaning. I studied Robert Henri's *Isadora Duncan* sketch when my art education class researched several artworks from the Arkansas Arts Center in Little Rock. I was drawn to the gestural quality, the lines, the movement and the ambiguity of the figure. At the time, I did not know anything about Henri or Isadora Duncan, but I could not have chosen a better artist and work to inspire the type of lessons I wanted to write.

As soon as I began researching Robert Henri I was hooked. His charisma and passion came through to me in the words of his book, *The Art Spirit*, and in his many works of art. Art, he believed, should be about something (Henri, 1923). Even if you are drawing a flower, you should communicate to the viewer why you are drawing it. What is it about the flower that makes it worthy to become the subject of an artwork? Every line, every color, every shape should move toward this single idea that the artist wants to convey. Somewhere in the midst of my reading I dubbed this idea of the essence, and it stuck.

In this same class, I designed a mini-lesson for a small group of seven high school students. Inspired by *Isadora*



John Sykes used repetition and colored pencil to capture a mood.

I didn't just want to teach any art. I wanted to help students understand "the why."

I decided to focus this lesson on gesture drawing to capture what Henri was really about—not just gesture, but essence through gesture. I asked students to look at several gesture drawings. With the first three, I asked them to define gesture by discerning common characteristics in these works. When we got to *Isadora Duncan*, I asked them instead to tell me what Robert Henri thought of his subject. The students looked at me with blank, expectant stares for a few seconds. But then one of them ventured an answer: "She looks angelic." I noticed that the answer came from Chad, the outcast of my group. Aware of my growing

excitement, I prodded him. "What makes you say that?" Chad replied, "The Christ-like pose, with her arms out at her sides." Insightful comments followed with another student noticing how the exclusion of her feet and the ground gave the appearance of ascending to heaven. Then someone else mentioned how the graceful line quality created a sweeping motion up toward the heavens. Finally, a student remarked how the backward tilt of her head suggested she was gazing serenely into the sky above.

I don't know whether or not I intended to ask the next question beforehand, but we were on a roll and it turned out to be

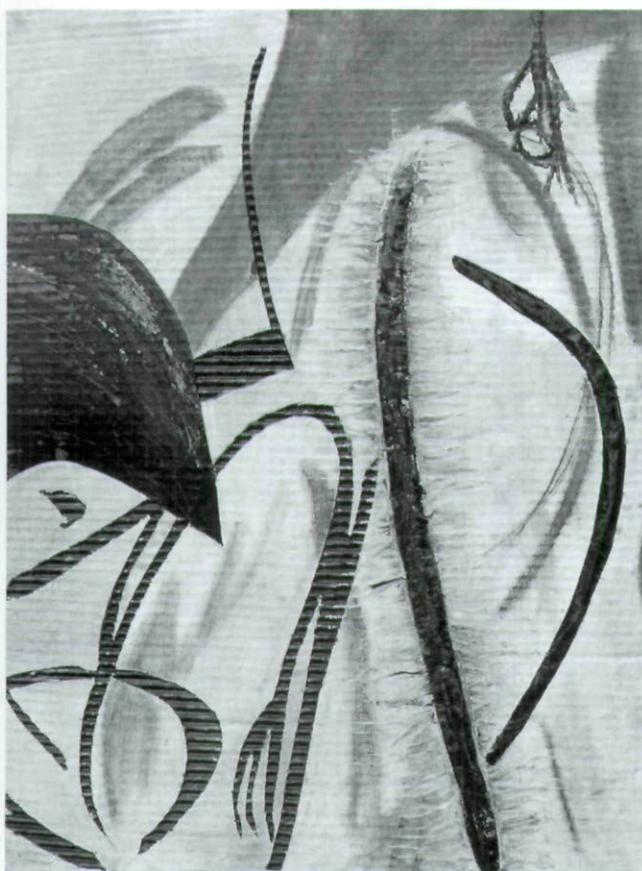
the pivotal point of my later unit. I asked them why Robert Henri would choose gesture drawing for his portrait. Why not have Duncan sit for a portrait or even do a detailed contour drawing? The students were onto the answer instantly. Gesture conveys feeling and emotion in ways that other drawing styles do not.

This was a defining moment for me. I had known that I wanted to teach art—even that I wanted to teach high school. But that lesson taught me *how* I wanted to teach. I didn't just want to teach any art. I wanted to help students understand "the why."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Gesture: Capturing the Essential.** My unit was designed for a high school-level Drawing II class. After a brief pre-assessment in contour drawing, I decided that students would benefit from a unit on gesture drawing since it allows for more freedom, creativity, and content. This unit was designed to teach students how to draw the figure while simultaneously teaching expression, capturing content and meaning, exploring different media techniques, and understanding the meaning of images in contemporary culture.

When required to develop a unit during my student teaching internship, I felt much calmer with the suggestion that I expand on my ideas of *essence*. I began with my brief talk about Robert Henri. I showed students his picture when he was young, so that hopefully they could identify with him. I discussed his career as an art teacher, and his relationship to the similar *essence*-related quests of Picasso and Matisse. I showed students some of his gesture drawings, ending with *Isadora Duncan*, but at this point I did not ask much about her, since I intended to do that later.

Responding to a suggestion by my teacher-mentor of making the content relevant to contemporary students, I clicked my next slide over to an image of the popular American musician and actress, Beyoncé Knowles, and asked, "Who knows who this is?" They giggled. I noticed that a student who had previously been zoning-out was instantly alert. I told them that in order to understand the idea of *essence* better, I wanted them to compare these photos from



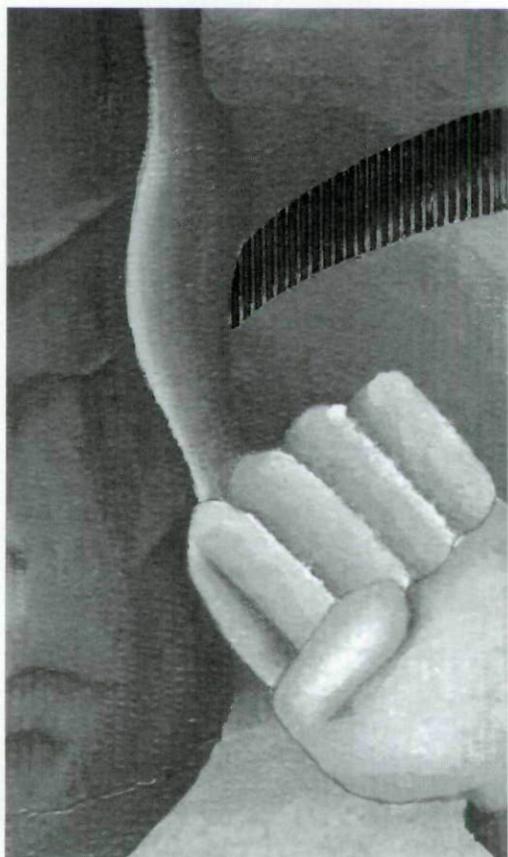
Beyoncé's photo shoot. I asked them, "What is Beyoncé saying about herself by titling these images 'The Essence of Beyoncé?'" The previously zoned-out student blurted out, "She's sayin' that she's hot!" The class erupted in laughter. I laughed too, and my nervousness evaporated. We compared and contrasted the images of Beyoncé, and then two other magazine images.

After demonstrating gesture drawing and explaining the thought process, I directed student volunteers to pick from slips of paper identifying distinctive qualities (such as angry, angelic, fearful, etc.) out of my "Essence Hat" and assume a pose that embodied that nature. The rest of the class drew the pose, trying to figure out what the essence was and capture it in a short 1-2 minute gesture drawing. When we stopped between drawings, I would ask various students if I could show their drawings to the class. By showing the drawings and telling what was successful about them, I raised students' self-esteem while continuing to show what worked when making gesture drawings, including expressive line quality and emphasis of the most important part of the pose. After numerous drawings, I re-directed students' attention to Henri's *Isadora Duncan* for discussion in light of what they had just done.

The lesson progressed to the idea of capturing and transferring the fundamental quality of a gesture drawing into a large abstract mixed media piece. Students viewed and discussed several abstract mixed media works by Robert Rauschenberg, Miriam Schapiro, and Dave Kinsey. I instructed students to use a viewfinder, select areas of their previous gesture drawings that summed up the essence of the figures and create three preliminary compositions. The students began work on their large piece once I had approved their choice of best composition. I demonstrated a few painting techniques and created a sample board featuring eight different paint applications that they could try. I told them that they had to use three media and three techniques from the board, so that they would have a wide variety of styles on their finished pieces.

I chose to have them work on cardboard, since they were working in large scale and mixed media when projects can become pretty heavy and textured. Some students chose to use spray paint with acrylic paints. Others layered tape and other materials on to the surface of the cardboard. I showed them how to remove the top layer of the cardboard to reveal the corrugation underneath and several students used that technique as well.

At the end of the semester I asked my students to fill out a survey, including a question about which of the assignments was their favorite. About three-fourths of the students chose the assignment I am describing. They mentioned feeling freed from the pressure of making it look realistic, and enjoyed the chance to be expressive and abstract. Even better, when I asked them to fill out self-evaluations of their projects, all but two students could tell me what *essence* they had been trying to achieve and how they had made conscious choices toward that end.



Above: Kyle Looney's final mixed media work expressing the *essence* of frenzy.

Below: Josh Burns' final mixed media work expressing the *essence* of strength.

Conclusions and Implications

The units developed by Katy O'Neal and Amber Gooch give evidence that they were knowledgeable about the high school art students they taught. Each lesson built on previously acquired skills such as one-point perspective, contour figure drawing, and specific media usage. Katy understood that high school students desire a way to communicate their views to others in an effective way. Amber made a connection to her students by using contemporary media images, such as those of Beyoncé Knowles. Units included as learning objectives the development of art skills and understandings such as drawing from observation, value scales, and application of various drawing and painting media, while also focusing on art history and art criticism. Furthermore, the overarching concepts of *place* and *essence* provided these interns and their students a sense of focus and purpose that gave significance and meaning to all of the activities within each unit.

Katy's and Amber's lessons were extensions of their own personal investigations, experimentations, and reflections. Their testimonies support important ideas of authors—such as Hatfield, Montana, and Deffenbaugh (2006), Gradle (2006), and Kind, Irwin, Grauer, and De Cosson (2005)—that the arts can engage both teachers and students in a shared experience of new perspectives, connections, and artistic outcomes. John Dewey (1977) eloquently acknowledged his internal conviction and awareness of the processes or journeys of learning in an essay first published in 1904. Speaking of the success of some teachers, Dewey states:

They are themselves so full of the spirit of inquiry, so sensitive to every sign of its presence and absence, that no matter what they do, nor how they do it, they succeed in awakening and inspiring like alert and intense mental activity in those with whom they come in contact. (p. 265)

The implication for art teacher education programs is to lead students to the realization that artistry in teaching concomitantly requires enthusiastic exploration of meaningful issues and significant artistic pursuits.

Deborah Kuster is Associate Professor of Art at the University of Central Arkansas, Conway. E-mail: dkuster@uca.edu

Kathryn O'Neal is an Art Teacher at Lonoke Middle School in Lonoke, Arkansas. E-mail: Katy.Oneal@lonoke.k12.ar.us

Amber Gooch is an Art Teacher in Mayflower, Arkansas. E-mail: ambergooch@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Dewey, J. (1977). The relation of theory to practice in education. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey: The middle works, 1899-1924, Vol 3: 1903-1906*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Gradle, S. (2006). Developing artistry in teaching: Ritual art and human concerns. *Art Education, 59*(2), 12-19.
- Hatfield, C., Montana, V., & Deffenbaugh, C. (2006). Artist/art educator: Making sense of identity issues. *Art Education, 59*(3), 42-48.
- Henri, R. (1923). *The art spirit*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company.
- Janson, H.W., & Janson, A. F. (2003). *History of Art* (6th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kind, S., Irwin, R. L., Grauer, K., & De Cosson, A. (2005). Medicine wheel imag(in)ings: Exploring holistic curriculum perspectives. *Art Education, 58*(5), 33-38.
- Kowalchuk, E. (1997). Differing perceptions of art and teaching: Examining how beginning and experienced teachers think about art in instruction. Prepared for *Stories about perception: Honouring the work of Ron MacGregor*. Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia.
- Popovich, K. (2006). Designing and implementing: Exemplary content, curriculum, and assessment in art education. *Art Education, 59*(6), 33-40.
- Roberts, T. (2005). Teaching real art making. *Art Education, 58*(2), 40-46.
- Stewart, M. G. & Walker, S. R. (2005). *Rethinking curriculum in art*. Worcester, MA: Davis Publications.
- Sultana, A., & Klecker, B. M. (1999, November) *Evaluation of first-year teachers' lesson objectives by Bloom's taxonomy*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Education Research Association, Point Clear, AL.
- Torff, B. (2003). Developmental changes in teachers' use of higher order thinking and content knowledge. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(3), 563-569.
- Walker, S. (2001). *Teaching meaning in artmaking*. Worcester, MA: Davis Publications.
- Walling, D. (2006). Brainstorming themes that connect art and ideas across the curriculum. *Art Education 59*(1), 18-24.

AUTHORS' NOTE

All photos of student artworks are reprinted with permission.

Copyright of Art Education is the property of National Art Education Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.