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Lesson Planning in 5th Grade Visual Arts: Teaching Art Lessons Aligned with Washington State Visual Arts Standards to Fifth Grade Students in an Art Specialist Classroom

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Abstract:

Lesson Planning in 5th Grade Visual Arts: “Teaching Art Lessons Aligned with Washington State Visual Arts Standards to Fifth Grade Students in an Art Specialist Classroom,” By Hanna Johnson

With growing push for increased time spent on STEM in classrooms, visual arts often fall to the wayside. Even rarer is the opportunity to practice teaching visual art lessons in a dedicated elementary art classroom. This project describes the process of developing art curriculum for fifth grade students, based on course work in ART 380 Educating the Child and using Washington State Visual Arts standards and corresponding assessment. Over the course of six weeks, with one 45-minute lesson per week, students produced a series of images illustrating an important event, person, or place in their life. By producing these artworks, students developed techniques and vocabulary in preparation for an assessment of one of their final pieces. Students learned to identify and use horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines. They identified objects in the foreground, middle ground, and background of example pieces and practiced creating depth in their artwork. Students incorporated a variety of line qualities, textures, sizes of objects, positions, overlapping, details, and color combinations.

My name is Hanna Johnson, I am an elementary education student in the Woodring College of Education. For my honors project, I designed and taught a series of fifth grade art lessons. These lessons were taught in an art specialist class at Irene Reither Elementary School in Everson, a short drive from Bellingham. A strong passion for the arts compelled me to design an honors project that utilized both my teaching and artistic skills. In the elementary education program, future teachers are given subject-specific internships to allow for practice implementing and teaching varied curriculum. Thus far, I have had a science internship in a fifth-grade class, and a writing workshop internship with fourth grade students. Visual arts is not offered as an internship option. Being core subjects measured by standardized testing, I recognize the value of focusing teaching opportunities on math and literacy. However, in order to provide a balance of subjects to my future students, I must seek out opportunities to teach subjects that are often excluded from the school day. Art provides a unique opportunity for students to express their ideas through images and share their viewpoint through intentional design choices. Art is a means of expression and an opportunity to refine visual creating skills and learn about symbolism and the messages art conveys. To give my future students the opportunity to study and create art, I need experience designing and teaching art lesson plans. The fuel for my fire was provided to me in the form of an art education course. In this class, I built on my knowledge of the arts and designed several art projects. The honors capstone was the spark I needed to create my own internship experience with the lessons I had designed in my art education course.

The inspiration for this project came from my ART 380 course, also known as Art Educating the Child. Several class activities and projects influenced my lesson plans. My first idea for my lessons came from a resource we used in class called the VTS image of the week. VTS is visual thinking strategies, a way to use art to promote critical thinking. The image of the week webpage was designed to provide an activity for art teaching in the remote learning environment. The website posts a new art piece every week, often famous pieces or from well known artists. The VTS strategy first prompts students to quietly and thoughtfully examine the image. Then the teacher facilitates a discussion where students describe what they see and how they interpret the elements of the artwork. Finally, students look at the image one more time to look for new insights based on the connections and interpretations shared by peers. In Art 380, we practiced this strategy in class at the beginning of the quarter. Sharing our interpretations of art as a group helped our class become more comfortable working together, and open to collaborating together on our art pieces later in the quarter.

My second idea for my project was a combination of two class projects from Art 380. At the beginning of the quarter we studied Jacob Lawrence and his paintings from his series called *The Migration Series*. In this series, Jacob Lawrence produced 60 paintings depicting situations and emotions from The Great Migration of African Americans from the southern states. This storytelling with images in a sequence became part of my design for my lessons with the fifth grade students. I also used much of the design of my final project in my lessons. For the final project, my professor asked each student to design an art lesson based on Washington State Visual Arts Standards, and standards from one other subject area. She emphasized weighing art equally with the other subject area. Art lessons combined with another subject area often address

art superficially and end up as a craft and not an opportunity to use artistic techniques. For example, coloring a map or a diagram of an insect are not teaching students artistic techniques or how artists communicate through their pieces. For my final in the class, I chose to combine art with literacy standards from the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards are federally funded, K-12 math and literacy standards used across the United States. I wanted to provide students an opportunity to share a story in a picture book format, to teach writing and sequencing events that were supported by images that could complement the text with more details.

I am very grateful to have had the guidance and support of my professor for Art 380, Margot Stroop, as my project advisor. Throughout my project timeline, she continued to provide wonderful insights on teaching students techniques and finding resources to support my project.

I pitched my first project idea to the principal of Irene Reither Elementary. I was familiar with the school from having volunteered there as a Compass to Campus mentor. This is a program at WWU where college students are placed at economically disadvantaged schools to mentor and support students in their classrooms. I was planning to teach my lessons in a general education classroom as an art docent. In my proposal, the structure of my lesson would begin with a VTS (Visual Thinking Strategy) discussion using the image of the day on the VTS website, provide a short presentation on one of the elements of art, and finish with a project that correlates with the Washington Visual Arts Standards for the assigned grade level. The estimated duration of the project proposal was 8 weeks with the final two weeks devoted to presentations of the students' work. Each weekly lesson would last 45 minutes for the duration of Spring quarter. As the art docent, I would monitor the changes in the students' analysis of art by collecting their notes on the VTS discussions. During the presentation of my project, I would discuss how I used the WA State Visual Arts Curriculum and the VTS guide to help students grow in their ability to critically analyze art, while enjoying the process of visual arts craftsmanship. This method of discussion about a work of art would allow students to develop a greater appreciation of craftsmanship and meanings being conveyed by an artist through the elements of art.

The principal told me that their school had an art specialist, and students had an art class once a week. She encouraged me to contact the art teacher about joining her class to teach my lessons. The opportunity to work with an elementary art teacher was an advantage, since I had anticipated having to find time to teach art in a general classroom, where math and literacy demands precluded additional activities. After being invited to join the art teacher, my project underwent significant revisions. Specifically, my original lesson plan underwent two major revisions. First, when I presented the above idea to the school's art teacher, she was concerned with the heavy emphasis on discussion of art rather than practicing techniques. She explained that students have time devoted to engaging in discussion in their other subjects. When the students were in their art specialist time, it was important to provide time to create, which would not be covered in the rest of their school day. To provide lessons tailored to this goal, I switched gears and began to create my second lesson plan, based on my final project from ART 380.

My final project from art 380 focused more on students practicing artistic techniques compared to my previous idea to have an art discussion. In my revised plan, the students made a list of important personal life events, people places, and objects. They choose one item from the list to be the topic of their project. They shared about this event through a sequence of 8 images, which were intended to have accompanying text to explain the pictures. The pictures and text had a sequence and important details to help the reader understand the story.

This project uses Washington State Visual Art Standards as well as Common Core State Standards for writing: Anchor Standard 2, “Organize and develop artistic ideas and work,” and “Performance Standard (VA:Cr2.3.5) a. Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance.” The literacy standards I included were “CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences, and “CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.” This was the project plan I presented to the students. We began our lessons using this roadmap, and the students made a rough draft of all their ideas, and began making a final draft. My original plan was to add the writing after all the images had been created.

Similar to math and literacy, visual arts have their own standards. These are provided by OSPI, the office of superintendent of public instruction for Washington State. Ensuring my lessons were aligned with state standards held me accountable to teaching techniques and vocabulary expected at this grade level, and that students were gaining knowledge in visual art skills, not just making crafts. In my future classroom, I will need to continue to base my projects in these standards to justify allotting time for honing visual art skills. There are eleven standards for visual arts. These standards are spread across four stages of the artistic process. The stages are creating, performing/presenting/producing, responding, and connecting. The lessons and products the students created would fall under the creating category. Within this category, I addressed the three anchor standards associated with creating, “1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. 2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. 3. Refine and complete artistic work.” The students first brainstormed a list of possible events they could use for their art project. They then made rough drafts of their images. This would fall under generating and conceptualizing. The students organized their event into images that were sequenced in chronological order. A later revision to my lesson plan would account for the students refining their art with tips and techniques I introduced each week, such as adding texture, details, and variety of lines.

I soon revised my lesson a second time, dropping my literacy plans and instead, tailoring my instruction to prepare students for a required assessment of their art skills. My teacher was required to give an assessment that spring, called *A Postcard View*. Along with standards by grade level, the Washington state arts standards also include these performance assessments. I offered to add preparation for this assessment in my lessons with the students. This allowed me to have an extra lesson with the students, whereas if I had not changed my plan I would have had to end my project early to allow the art teacher to prepare the students.

The *Postcard View* assessment addressed specific skills that the students were expected to demonstrate understanding of in the piece they submitted for grading. In this art piece, students were expected to be able to identify and use horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines. They also needed to place objects in the foreground, middle ground, and background of their artwork. The final product also needed to include a variety of line qualities, textures, size, position, overlap, details, and color. These objectives were much more technique focused than my previous standards. Before my revisions for A Postcard View, I was using standards that focused on organization and idea development, rather than techniques or content vocabulary. Now, I had to provide explicit instruction to give the students the tools they needed to be successful with these new expectations.

To accomplish this, I incorporated a workshop model, which is a teaching structure taught in literacy education classes. The goal of the workshop model is to maximize student independent practice by providing brief, targeted, explicit instruction on a relevant technique. Students are then given the majority of the workshop time to practice. This model is helpful because it allows the students to engage with the skill rather than watch and listen to a lecture. This model helped me keep track of how long I spent explaining techniques, and be accountable to providing practice time. The goal is for students to make gradual adjustments and developments in their abilities through frequent practice sessions.

The mini lesson is comprised of three parts: there is the mini lesson itself, which should last about 7-10 minutes. Then there is the independent practice, which should last 20-40 minutes. The lesson concludes with time for sharing progress, which should last 2-5 minutes. Each lesson began with a connection to what we had learned the previous week. The students only had one lesson with me each week, which made this first step critical to retention of content. I then shared the day's objective was, and gave my explicit instruction. Following my instruction, I incorporated engagement techniques to allow students opportunities to practice with my guidance and feedback. I would project an image featuring the day's technique, ask students to turn and talk to a partner about what they noticed, and then share out to the whole group. *Turn and Talk* is a great strategy to engage all students in sharing, without having to share in front of the class. Often at the start of the lesson, the students needed to warm up before they were ready to share out. After a few weeks, the students became more confident in sharing in the whole group. Each week, I presented a PowerPoint to the students and used the document camera to illustrate techniques. As the weeks progressed, I added new slides to the original PowerPoint to allow for easy reference to previous materials before teaching new concepts. The students would then work on their pieces at their desks, and I would leave the PowerPoint on for students to refer to as they worked.

An example of a warmup activity would be: I had just given a lesson on explicit instruction on foreground, middle ground, and background. I then projected an image of an artwork that displayed objects in these three areas in the painting. I then asked the students to turn and talk to a partner about an object they saw in each zone. During pair sharing, I would walk arounds and listen in. This way, if I heard a response from a student who does not often share out, I could encourage them and highlight their ideas. Also, I would check in with students who were confused or did not have a partner. I would make threesomes, and sometimes ask

another partner to share with a student who was confused. After the students had time to share, I called the group back together to call on students. I would try to call on different students each week, especially keeping an eye out for those who did not share as often, and calling on those students.

The classroom art teacher had emphasized inclusion of examples that represented all levels of art, especially art that was at a lower ability level. The students needed to see their ability level reflected in the examples I shared to know that all abilities were welcome, and that art skills at all stages still were valued and worthy of being called art. My project advisor encouraged me to include growing the students' knowledge of famous artists by incorporating their work in my examples for the week. She recommended famous artists that had works with themes similar to the interests of my students. For example, Norman Rockwell is famous for his sport paintings, including depictions of popular sports such as basketball and baseball. David Hockney is well known for his paintings of backyard pools, including a piece titled *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*.

The students were very receptive to my instruction and techniques concerning space in their art, lines and texture. Below I have highlighted examples of students incorporating the techniques in their work.

Many students had examples of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines in their artwork. Sidewalks, roads, and roof lines were popular for horizontal lines. Building walls, sides of tables and other furniture were common for vertical lines. Diagonal lines were used in leaf and grass texture. Several students who drew trips to amusement parks had diagonal lines in their rollercoaster tracks. Another student who made a picture about a ski trip had diagonal lines in their ski lift. Diagonal lines were present in the lines on the floor of the basketball court and in sun rays drawn in outdoor scenes. Gravel, trees, fences, roofs, wood, sand, waves in the water, calm water.

The concept of foreground, middle ground, and background was the most difficult for students to execute. About half the students were able to demonstrate depth in their work. One student drew her backyard with the trampoline drawn larger than a forest on a hill in the background. Students drawing road trips drew houses, mountains and trees in the background smaller than cars and roads in the foreground. Several students drew interior views of rooms in their houses with people and furniture in the foreground drawn larger than people and furniture in the background. One student angled the lines of his floor and ceiling to show depth of the room, with the ceiling and floor lines aligned to the back wall of the room.

Potential additional information on water 2 styles, researching pictures, blending

During my time with the fifth graders, I had one student in particular who would not begin work on his art. He felt very discouraged because he didn't know how to draw what he wanted. He was not confident in his ability to draw. He could not decide on a picture book subject. This was a struggle for many students. They needed guidance in idea generation, and how to problem solve when they could not think of ideas. I would ask about hobbies, sports, and family vacations to help the students' creative wheels start turning. Students would then think of

events, and pick one they enjoyed the most or remembered the best. With this student, I tried these strategies. After about 15 minutes of dedicated one on one time, he decided on his idea of a family fishing trip. Even with an idea secured, he did not begin drawing. We brainstormed the objects and scenes that were part of the fishing trip. He did not know how to draw them, and was not confident enough to take a chance and try it out. I took this as a teaching opportunity to model improvisation by drawing a model of a boat on an island. I explained it may not be perfect the first time, but that was ok because this was just a rough draft. My goal was for him to see all the images together so he would know the plan for his story. He could use his past experiences to draw his best version of a boat from memory. For the final draft, he could look up pictures of real boats to help refine his image.

I encouraged him to give it his best shot, and that revision is part of the artistic process. He used my model image to copy and draw on his own paper. Then, he tried blending different colors for the sand and using dots for sand grain texture. He used different shades of blue for the ocean and sky. I continued to check in on his progress each lesson and complimented the techniques he used in his art. When he was leaving class on the day of our lesson, he thanked me for helping him with his art. Initially I had been concerned he would not make a finished piece, but in the end, patience and persistent encouragement had made a difference.

I had several students whom I encouraged to add more details to their artwork. One was a girl who was making her picture sequence about a recent basketball tournament she played in. Her initial sketch included the court, bleachers, and stick figures representing the two teams. I encouraged her to visualize the scene and recall what else had been there that she could include, how could she personalize the scene to help us feel like we were there, to include details that helped us know her team and what they were like. She added several details to her work and explained why she chose them. She drew water bottles around the team bleachers because her teammates were excited to return to the game and they left the bottles on the ground. Each water bottle was a different color. She included scoreboards with the home team and guest team's respective points. She included a referee table and chairs with score keeping materials such as jars of pens, notepads, and paper.

Another student was making his image series about how his mom taught him to swim. He started with a drawing of a large rectangle with a stick figure drawing of his mom and himself. I asked him to think about how he could use the space around the pool to add more details. He added lawn chairs, a diving board, flip flops and a bush to help set the scene of what the pool was like.

Several students experimented with drawing 3d structures. One student drew his house at an angle, where the front of the house and one side wall of the house were both visible at the same time. He was excited to discover that if he put a window on the front of the house, looking through the window, one would be able to see to the back of the room. He was able to draw the window at the back of the room because of the angle he positioned the house in his drawing. This allowed him to make the house more like his actual home.

Designing this project gave me the opportunity to experience independent lesson planning, while also learning to juggle demands of district and state standards. In my science and

writing internships, I had designed the lessons with a team of two other colleagues. With these lessons, I had high control over how I would teach the vocabulary and concepts that would be tested on the assessment. An important part of lesson planning is making plans flexible. Even after revising my project idea twice, I continued to adapt and change my lessons based on student interests. For example, many students were illustrating stories that took place in their house. I included pictures of kitchens and backyards, and talked about the use of depth in these settings.

Not only did I have to make changes to my lesson ideas, I had to shift from the perspective of an experienced artist to that of a developing artist. I had to realize there was so much I did not know about teaching art. Initially, I took many of my abilities, such as making quick drafts, for granted. When I planned my lessons, I would think about what may be difficult for the students, what may need more explaining. Pressing lightly with the pencil for drafts, sketching basic forms of people before filling in details, and coloring shapes with crayon strokes in the same direction are techniques I use and don't have to consciously think about. I needed to take time to address these skills explicitly, not hoping they would be absorbed through osmosis of observing pieces of art. Developing these skills takes time, and I learned to plan activities based on the amount of time a fifth-grade student would need, not how long I would take with a project. For example, I could produce six rough draft images within the 45-minute lesson window. As I spent more time in the art class, I reflected on the reasons for the differences between our abilities. First, the students had less time practicing their art skills. Second, the students did not have as much practice with generating ideas. I have been through the K-12 experience, where I was thoroughly conditioned to write for a topic and execute a product quickly through classroom activities and state testing. Quickly churning out possible paragraph ideas, locking in on a target, and spitting out an essay was part of making the grade. However, these fifth graders had less experience with rapid idea generation. They had only been through three writing state tests. I had to realize that skills that took 10 minutes for me were not realistic time frames for them. I had to be patient, and not only provide time, but scaffolds. The students needed thought processes and guidance to help them create a list of topics.

Also, I have been refining my techniques for over a decade. I have had visual art teachers in middle school, high school, and in college. I am confident in my abilities because I have had praise and success to reinforce my pursuit of art. In the class, there were many eager artists, but I was also teaching students who felt left out of claiming this artist identity. These students had spent the past two years of upper elementary in the pandemic. Remote learning was not an ideal environment for refining artistic skills. The amount of art experiences these students had when they arrived at fifth grade was likely less than I had as a fifth grader. I had to be patient with students that were reluctant and recognize they needed to be encouraged. An artwork is a very personal expression, and often highly judged. People are told, like with many hobbies, that they are either good or bad at art. Some students may have internalized this and decided they no longer could be an artist.

Art requires an equal level of thought and care in preparing lessons, and there are several additional steps I would take if I were to teach this lesson series in the future. First, to have been better prepared to meet the students at their current ability levels, I would inquire about the

students' ability levels, and determine the types of projects the teacher had taught to the group I would be teaching. This background knowledge would allow me to have my strategies ready from day one. Second, I would have included more examples to share with my students from the start of the project. Also, audience members of the oral presentation of my work were interested in seeing how the students who had my instruction did on their assessment compared to the other fifth grade classes that did not have my lesson instruction. Third, I would be sure to collect and compare data from colleagues, and use the results to make changes to how I teach the lessons. Last, if I had more time with the students, I would have invited the students to present their work, which would have included another stage of the artistic process in my lessons.

In my profession, I will use this new knowledge to help me be a more patient, thoughtful educator. Planning these lessons has helped me uncover and adjust my habits and attitudes towards lesson planning. I have a tendency to plow fast through content to stay on pace, and not recognize that time needs to be allotted for questions and additional explanation. Teaching these lessons has taught me that my way is not the only way. I am realizing that being open to suggestion helps both myself to grow as an educator and the students have a more resonating experience. By expanding the scope of my vision, I was able to allow this project to grow and evolve. I also realize the importance of preparation in generating a more successful outcome, but that not all parameters can be controlled. With these reflections in hand, I have the tools I need to continue to pursue and refine my teaching of visual arts.

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