Literature Review #2 Debra Troyanos

**Holistic Art Education & Artistic Development**

**What is Holistic Art Ed?**

Holistic education is a philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace. It aims to help students be the most that they can be in life, helping them reach self-actualization, so it has a psychological aspect to it. The holistic perspective is concerned with the development of every person’s intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials. Holistic education also aims to give students a reverence for life, and encourages personal and collective responsibility.

Many of these core ideas of Holistic education are really founded in religion because it places emphasis on human values and relationships, as well as becoming “enlightened”. Some believe they can become enlightened from creating or even viewing artwork, just as one would with a religious experience. Spirituality is also an important component in holistic education as it emphasizes the connectedness of all living things and stresses the “harmony between the inner life and outer life”. (Farber, 2012). In Holistic Education the basic three R’s of Education are Relationships, Responsibility and Reverence for all life.

The roots of holism can be seen in the work of such educational theorists as John Dewey, Howard Gardner, Friedrich Frobel, and Maria Montessori. The humanist viewpoint also traces back to the likes of Henry Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. (These esteemed names alone make me want to believe in this concept.) Art education is a natural fit for Holistic education because it is or can easily be about all of these things. Experiential learning is significant to holistic learning, and this is also directly translated to art education.

# The Holistic Theory of art education recognizes the inter-connectedness of body, mind, spirit, and emotions.  It is about learning art through experiences in an organic process. The young  child’s motivation for artmaking is to visually express these feelings and experiences. The trouble is when that as the child grows older and more self –conscious, they begin to judge against themselves because they have absorbed the cultural belief that art is not good if it is not realistic. Picasso summed it up best when he said “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”

**Why should we include the Holistic approach in art education?**

The practice of holistic education did not truly take form until a cultural paradigm shift that in the 1960s, which makes sense, since it fit in with an overall sixties philosophy of free expression and a break from controlling guidelines. A spirit of “doing your own thing” became more acceptable, expressing feelings and emotions, as well as becoming more conscious of the reverence for life and responsibility for the environment and earth. It is making a comeback in the last decade. With today’s refocus on mindfulness, physical and mental health, stress relief, and search for deeper meaning, there is a new interest in education that involves the whole person- body, mind and spirit. Holistic art education encourages students to address the important issues of their life, in their moment and place in history. It’s intention is to nurture whole and elevated individuals, and art can do that. Deeper and more purposeful work, and experiences with nature are part of this.

**Community**-

Community is an integral aspect in holistic education. The classroom is often seen as a community, which is within the larger community of the school, which is within the larger village, town, or city, and which is, by extension, within the larger community of humanity.

In the art education classroom , care should be taken to create a community of students who inspire, respect, encourage and support each other to create works that have an authentic voice. They should have the sense that they are respected, and their instructor should act as a facilitator or guide who has technical expertise, but helps them think as artists. Students should spend a lot of time reflecting on their thinking, choices, and their growth. The importance of reflection should not be underestimated as it is key to future artistic growth.

**The teacher’s role:**

Rather than seeing education as a process of transmission and transaction, in holistic education, the teacher is seen less as person of authority who leads and controls but rather is seen as a mentor or facilitator . According to the Holistic approach, the artroom should be seen as places where students and adults work toward a mutual goal. Open and honest communication is expected, and differences between people are respected and appreciated. Cooperation, rather than competition, is the expectation. Private or alternative schools incorporating holistic beliefs do not usually give grades or rewards. The reward of helping one another and growing together is emphasized, rather than being placed above one another. (This would be difficult in a public school situation, and will be addressed in the conclusion.) Students are expected to self-regulate their own learning, although not completely expected to do this on their own (as seen in Montessori schools). The teacher’s role is to anticipate “teachable moments” when the opportunity presents itself. “The key is not teaching how to make something, but how to think about something”. (p. 79. Castro). In planning lessons, the teacher needs to consider if the problem they are giving students reflect creative thinking and what artists and creative thinkers struggle with? Is it relevant to their lives and the lives of others? It is important to give them credit for the deep thought they are capable of. We must encourage them to create authentic work, original because it comes from finding their voice.

**The curriculum**:

Since Holistic education feels that meaningfulness is an important factor in the learning process. People learn better when what is being learned is important to them. “Opportunities for expression are designed to call for deeper levels of engagement and encourage personal voice” (Carroll,2004). In order to educate the whole person, some key factors are essential to this type of education. First, students need to learn about themselves, including self-respect. Second, they need to learn about relationships with others, socially and emotionally (one’s own self in relation to others). Third, it is important for students to learn resilience by overcoming difficulties, facing challenges and learning how to obtain success. Finally, students learn about [aesthetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetics). This helps the student to see the beauty of what is around them and learn to have awe for art, beauty, and the natural world for the rest of their life. The curriculum should allow for opportunities to work alone and collaboratively, in 2 or 3 dimensional media. Other ways it can be incorporated is to align with other ideas themes in the outer curriculum. Combining disciplines is based on the holistic premise that division between disciplines should be eliminated. One must understand the world in wholes as much as possible and not in fragmented parts. (Gradle, 2009). In addition, the teacher should take into account the issues in the school community, population and culture when planning the curriculum so it has direct relevance to the students. “Teacher awareness of the world in which learners live including popular culture, events, shared experiences, and developments in individual’s lives helps inform instructional decisions.” (Carroll,2004). Holism understands knowledge as something that is constructed by the context in which a person lives. Therefore, teaching students to reflect critically on how we come to know or understand information is essential. Flexible pacing in the curriculum should be considered so students do not feel they are not rushed or held back in learning concepts studied. Contemporary art educators should also include more discussion of meaning behind the work and provide time for contemplation of concept.

**How can art educators get to the deeper levels of meaning?**

If engaging learners at the deepest possible levels of meaning-making is the goal, then one way to incorporate the Holistic approach is to ask existential questions and encourage students to reflect and express their views on them. This type of universal question has had meaning to every person, society, and generation. They can stimulate the kind of deeper thinking and meaning, by asking questions such as: “Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Who are you? Who are we? What is of ultimate value to me? About me? What price for glory? Where are we going? How shall we get there? How will we know when we have arrived? Is this the end of evolution? Is what I am all that I may become? Is this all there is?” (Castro, 2004).

In caring about the question (because it has meaning to them) it is assumed that students will care enough and will find the motivation to learn the technique. Through contemplation and making connections, it gives purpose for artmaking, and it deepens the engagement and meaning to the student. (Carroll, 2006). One way we can encourage this kind of artmaking through teaching the use of art journals to explore feelings and emotions.  Perhaps we should allow this to be an ungraded assignment to allow more freedom and remove the fear of teacher approval.

**Artistic Development**

Over the last century, a variety of theories evolved for what causes artistic development. It turns out to be a combination of cognitive, social, psychological, and cultural factors. Development is also affected by different learning styles, multiple intelligences, disabilities, preferences, needs, culture, and education. However, one of the largest influences on an artist’s development is what Vygotsky termed the “ zone of proximal development” . This referred to the difference between what students can do on their own and what they can do with the benefit of instruction. The teacher/artist guiding students into this deeper level of creative thinking and reflection as used in the Holistic approach would definitely improve artistic development. The second largest influence that affects student’s artistic development is motivation. The decision or intention to get better must come from the student. This motivation would be intrinsic if the lessons and curriculum are composed of topics that are meaningful to the student, and that allowed their inner voice to be expressed.

**The challenges:**

Since researching Holistic art education, I have come to realize it should be added as an additional component of a contemporary art education. Perhaps it is truly best in its role in Art Therapy - in counseling groups such as in prisons, or with troubled or mentally ill individuals in rehabilitation facilities and hospitals. There art can be taught as an expression of emotion, with no grade or judgment attached. It is created purely for the joy of getting the feelings out and expressing oneself visually instead of verbally. Middle and high school students who are going through emotional times in their lives could benefit from this greatly as well. This could be cathartic and therapeutic for them. However, there is an expectation that we are art *educators*, more than *therapists*. We are expected show demonstrations, and teach techniques to make artwork. We are expected as educators to assess students progress through grading, and we are expected to use rubrics, and show evidence of learning especially in the current political climate. There is a pressure on students to perform at high levels of ability, including in art, in such courses as AP Studio Art where high school students are supposed to be doing college-level artwork. This issue that remains for me is “How can we *possibly* grade a student on artwork based on their feelings and emotions”? How can they develop artistically with no guidelines, yet how can you give them input or direction if they are just expressing their feelings? Does anything go? Is the answer to allow this type of work to be ungraded? If that happened, would the student remain motivated without the external push of a grade? The Holistic approach may not be as embraced in today’s high stakes, measured, educational culture, particularly in public schools who have come under attack. Yet, if not us, then who would be able to address these other important aspects of becoming a good citizen of the world and a self-actualized human? Art educators are in a position to include this important task to educate the whole person. “Instead of just invoking the reasoning part of the mind: we cultivate wonder, memory, awe, intuition, dreaming and fantasy” (Carroll, 2004). These have always been the subjects and task of art, and should be, at least in part, in art education as well. Therefore, for the benefit of artistic development of our students the holistic approach should be incorporated into the present curriculum.

**Resources:**

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