

Inquiry in Practice

EDUC 602



What Happens When Creative Arts
are Incorporated into Lessons in a 5th
Grade Classroom?

Deborah Milligan Herbel

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Genesis of the Question

Setting

My school setting is in a K-5 school, the only elementary school in a diverse town in central New Jersey. There are approximately 800 students in the school. My class is one of six fifth grades and is the “Inclusion” class. There are six classified students, one of which has Asperger’s Syndrome, a high functioning form of autism. There are a total of twenty students. I team teach with a special education teacher who modifies whole class lessons to meet individual needs.

Our population is working class and parental involvement is varied, depending on language capability, socio-economic standing and attitude. Caucasian, Hispanic and African American form the majority, with Asian members gaining in number each year. The mainly Christian/Judaic community is changing as Muslim, Hindu, and other families establish neighborhoods within the town. There are many first generation immigrants. The town has pride in its diversity and community spirit is evident in many ways.

Although our school setting is less than an hour from the New Jersey coastline, more than half of my class has never seen the beach. Although we are within the greater New York metropolitan area, more than half of my class has never been into the city, explored a museum, or visited a zoo. Changing populations bring about cultural differences and language problems that seem to grow more challenging every year as well. How do we incorporate these students, reach out to them when so often we are not familiar with many of the cultural differences ourselves? How do we find time to be more aware, more

understanding, and more knowledgeable of all the different types of backgrounds and cultural traditions? No longer does a teacher teach a subject, then go home to grade papers, there is so much more.

What do I wish to explore about my own teaching or educational setting?

I thought this would be an easy question to answer. I thought I knew enough about myself, my style of teaching, and my own classroom that I could easily form a question. I found this to be extremely difficult because of the many avenues that opened once I began trying to question myself. What is it about teaching that makes me passionate enough to devote my time to researching it?

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, and teaching to meet these varied intelligences, inspires me to think carefully and come up with lessons and assessments that incorporate as many of the intelligences as I can.

Differentiation of lessons and assessments to meet the needs of so many different types of learners also is a challenge I face every day. And this year I am facing the added challenge of being in an "Inclusion" classroom. What does that mean? What am I supposed to do differently? Why didn't I get any training or guidance in what it means? Does anyone have guidelines for Inclusion? Is it fair? Does one population gain at the expense of another population? Do all students benefit? How do I feel about Inclusion and all the burdens it places on teachers not trained in dealing with special needs students? How do I even find the physical space to accommodate another teacher, her desk, and her belongings in an already crowded room? How will I adjust to sharing my space, my time and my students? What if we don't get along? How will that affect my teaching?

I decided to go back and looked at myself as a student, not as a teacher. I loved school, I loved most of my teachers (except that witch of a seventh grade math teacher) and I loved learning new things. I still do. My experience in school was positive and gratifying, but it was literature and creative writing that made me passionate. Today I am still impressed by how the words of others can stir the reading and writing to my students, I want to make them passionate about it too.

Personally, I have a need to express myself in creative ways. I paint, quilt, collage, and collect junk to use in strange and unusual ways. I keep journals for different reasons, make journals that are painted and quilted and collaged. I discovered that making the very paper for the journals made them even more meaningful. This gives me another aspect of passion to incorporate in my classroom and in my research. How to merge the two has become the focus for forming my research question. In my heart I believe that children need to explore their creative side, need to let their imaginations soar and need to get their hearts and souls involved. It is important to find ways to nurture and develop their creative sides if we want them to soar.

With standardized testing however, students are drilled to write to a prompt rather than to explore their creative sides. They have been given strategies and skills rather than encouragement to look inside or explore the world around them. They don't always know they have something to write about, they don't always have confidence that what they write on their own could be of value. And while society as a whole is becoming more and more global, many students, especially

those from lower socio-economic groups, often are not exposed to real life experiences on which they can build their academic foundations. Therefore, we, as teachers, have to find ways to integrate creativity and ownership as part of the process itself.

Administration is supportive of ideas and allows freedom to teach creatively as long as the teaching methods and procedures are within boundaries that are acceptable to the Board of Education. Therefore, I feel free to explore new methods and teaching ideas within my classroom. I am also taking into consideration the fact that I will have to collect and analyze data while teaching full time. By forming a question and doing my research in coordination with my normal teaching responsibilities, I will be able to use lesson plans, assessment results, and problems that arise as data, thus making the time it takes to do this relevant to both researching and teaching. Time constraints are always a reality that must be considered.

After taking all of these aspects into consideration, I find I would like to explore what happens when students are given the chance to explore their world through hands-on activities that encourage imagination and creativity and then use this exploration as a foundation upon which to make learning more meaningful. Since I teach five subjects, I will not limit the research to one specific subject area, but rather let the creative exploration be the grounds of the research question:

“What happens when creative arts are incorporated into lessons?”

Literature Review

In the article, "Thinking outside the box", Brill contends that, "The significance of imagination and empathy in writing development is worthy of further study. It is interesting to note the difference between imagination and fantasy in that fantasy is usually, but not always, about the impossible, or at least the improbable, while imagination explores what might be discovering various possibilities... There is evidence that the use of imagination may facilitate reasoning skills in young children. But, on the other hand, imagination is education in somewhat insecure, as if the educational community is cautious of crediting its significance." (Brill, 2004).

The interesting part was not just that imagination and empathy were regarded as significant factors, but that a coding frame was also presented. This was helpful to me as a beginning researcher; it gave me an insight as to how this author/researcher was able to break down what he saw in his data. I began to understand ways in which I could develop coding for my students' writing. I can code whatever I want to code, possibly imaginative or empathetic development as well as the mechanical skills of writing. If, as the author of this article defends, imagination and empathy are elements of learning, then wouldn't their development be crucial to learning critical thinking? Why then, does the learning community not put more importance on imagination?

According to Professor Monseau, Youngstown State University, Ohio, "One reason imagination isn't encouraged more is the increasing use of standardized tests to hold teachers and students accountable for student progress. Many teachers still feel more comfortable when they're teaching students to write five paragraph essays." (Arditti, 2003).

The theme that emerges in the various articles and books I have been reading seems to be that students need to be able to be creative, need to be able to have input into what they write, not just be given a topic of no value or worth to THEM. Students need their imaginations to do their best work. As I read the next article, "What goes on in my head when I'm writing?" it seemed as if this author knew my

students! This year I have two particular boys who both struggle to write, yet are articulate and interesting speakers. It seems to me that allowing students a more comfortable way to express them, but still reinforcing writing skills as this author supports, is a good combination. The idea that these students were visual learners and needed to illustrate their answers because their writing was unsatisfactory to them sounded just like my students. Could the use of creative arts of various forms, as well as illustration, be used as a stimulus to teaching?

Lynell Burmark states that, "When children have limited knowledge of the language of instruction, the words may not mean anything at all. And even when they understand the words, students coming from many different backgrounds and cultures will bring different life experiences to mind. If it doesn't relate or connect to something in your own experience, you can't even imagine it. No longer can teachers assume their students are bringing with them a homogeneous set of experiences when they enter school. More and more children arrive in school never having been read to, not knowing how to hold a book, unaware of what to do with the letters that could spell their own name. Although the average child in the U.S. has had approximately 3,000 hours of pre-school language before entering first grade, the ever-growing population of "at risk" children average only 260 hours. The longer a child is left to failing, the more difficult remediation becomes. Without serious intervention, poor readers in first grade will still not be reading at grade level in fourth grade. In fact, the Indiana State Prison System is so convinced of this fact that it calculates future needs for prison beds by children failing reading in primary grades." (Burmark, 2002).

Taking this into consideration then, how do we encourage reading and writing, how do we make it meaningful to the population that needs it most, yet has the fewest resources and connections to the written word?

"Teachers are writing models for their students. When they show excitement about writing and write with them, students will realize and respond to that energy. All teachers of writing should model writing with their students. (Polochanin, 2006).

This author proposes that we model how we write, investigate how other authors write and that students be asked to reflect upon how they think about

writing and how they themselves write. Once again, we see that students are being encouraged to feel that their thinking and their writing have value.

“I believe that the idea of a one-size-fits-all writing process has turned off some talented young writers. You can talk and talk about the process writers use to write, but you can’t forget that real feeling is still the crucial ingredient.” (Fletcher, 2002).

Students often ,”View writing as a way to be wrong, they miss out on the value of writing to express and make sense of their thoughts, experiences and feelings struggling writers often believe that they have nothing of value to say.” (Anderson, 2006).

A theme that emerges throughout all the articles and books is that students must feel that they do have something of value to say, to write, and that we must value what they are writing. Students must be taught to value themselves as thinkers and writers. If students do not come prepared with sufficient language or experience, what can we use as a means to facilitate the learning process?

I would like to refer to two workshops, one in the fall (2006) and one in the spring (2007) that I attended at Columbia University as sources for gaining insight to this research. Two of the sessions I attended were conducted by Lucy Calkin and both times she reinforced the idea that writing with students must be student driven. Students must generate topics that engage their imaginations and interest them. But, as has been discussed, how do students do this when they have limited language or life experience to begin with? How do we inspire them to look inside, to understand that even if they have such limitations there are many ideas just waiting to be developed right inside their own imaginations?

“Engaging students’ imaginations is crucial to successful learning...we must shape our lessons to take advantage of their current skills and help develop them further.”(Egan, 2005).

After attending workshops, reading books and literature and hearing what others are saying about the learning process, I go into my research with confidence that allowing time for creative arts and stirring the imagination will prove to be a positive experience for my students and myself as well. I look forward to seeing what the data will show and how the students will respond.

Methodology

Planning it out

Once I had finally decided upon my question and knew that creative arts would play a center role in my research, I spent some time looking at the calendar, the curriculum, and my supply closet. There were mandates and standards that would need to be satisfied, time constraints that had to be reviewed, and practical things like physical space and cost of materials that had to be considered. I began to make an overview of what I planned to do, when I planned to fit it in, and how I would assign, and then assess, the work.

It would be essential to have the support of my team teacher as we would be doing this in an “Inclusion” class with special needs students actively involved.

Luckily, she is supportive and encouraging, willing to participate and assist in whatever ways that will help our students to do their best.

Meeting with the principal and vice-principal in advance of beginning this project also seemed like a good idea. I did not want them to think we were “playing” or “having fun” but were indeed, “learning and teaching”. Why does it seem wrong to mention the two in the same sentence?

As long as all IEP’s were met, we would be able to alter time blocks, flex our schedules and invite “creative’ friends to help in art projects, and hold classes in places other than our classroom. We hoped to have the local historical society allow us the use of the Wallace House, a Revolutionary War site, right here in our own town. Megan, my team teacher, and I went over the IEP’s, and then established what the non-classified students could use in the way of differentiated plans to suit their needs as well. Since

there are two of us, we have the opportunity to give each child more personal attention than just one teacher alone would have.

From past experience, we both knew that center activities can end up as disasters, with students not doing much more than mingling and talking, we knew we would have to be specific about the requirements, and consequences. By making it clear that they would be accountable for their work, had time limitations and consequences for non-compliance, it enabled us to maintain order and control while still allowing them choice and flexibility.

In math we created color-coded groups, determined by the needs of the students. The students would have small group lessons with their color groups, but be able to work with others so that they could be placed with more heterogeneous groups as well. All students were given pocket folders and a math center was set up where students could explore math activities, play and create games about math, do math related inquiry projects, read about math(we started a collection of information about people in math and math in real life) and store their folders. Corresponding activity packets were made so students could choose to work independently, with a partner, within a small group, or on a computer.

Groups were arranged according to levels of writing ability, and members were asked to choose an animal to represent their groups. Boxes for writing materials were decorated with their animals' pictures and notebooks were made to coordinate. Each student made a portfolio to keep in a group storage box. In the portfolios file folders were made for each genre that the curriculum requires. These portfolios were the "required" writing but would include checklists and rubrics, but work would be on-going rather than finished so students could return to edit and revise if they felt they could improve the work as time

went by. It was the process rather than the end product that we wanted to observe and record. We wanted students to get to know “good writers” so we started a collection of “good writing and good writers” that we could share, use as examples and just relish. It was important, we believed, that students should learn not just technical writing skills, but about “the writing life” as well. If we wanted them to be writers, we had to show them who writers are, how writing is important in real life and that they too could be good writers.

A science center with plants, an aquarium with turtles, bookcases of nature craft books and supplies was created in one corner and a table was put there so students could have a place for more hands-on exploration, leave projects out for extended time periods while working on them, or just “investigate” as they found the need. Lenses and microscopes were made available and science related “things” were put out to see and touch. As the seasons changed, so did our “things”. Students were encouraged to add to this collection. I already have rocks, geodes, insects (dead) in containers, birds’ nests, feathers, insides of a cactus, and some interesting “mystery objects” my very own children had, over the years, brought home in their pockets.

A Social Studies area was set up in the remaining corner. A bookcase was filled with novels and other types of books that related to the unit being taught. Maps and Atlases, arts and crafts books, even coloring books that related to the topic at hand were made available. Posters were hung in that area and students were encouraged to add to this area.

We thought that having each subject in a different part of the room would enable students to work at different projects rather than all doing the same thing all the time.

We got rolling carts, had a table top cut from plywood to go over them and filled it with things like: corks, fabric scraps, stencils, bark strips, fancy scissors, art supplies and various types of paper. Having lots of “stuff” is good for the imagination and getting the creative juices going; but keeping neat and orderly is also of importance. Since there is no sink in the room, and creative enterprises can often be messy, spray bottles of water and paper towels were put in each corner and ground rules were established that we could be messy while a work was in progress, but had to clean up and be responsible to have a “principal-clean” room within given time frames. Time management would be part of the learning process, for them and for us.

Getting started

Lesson one would begin in an area where I felt comfortable and experienced, writing Haiku and creating handmade books. I began by taking a student survey about poetry, trying to establish a baseline about their feelings towards reading and writing poetry. Next, I introduced them to Haiku in a formal lesson followed by a few mini-lessons. Megan reinforced this in small groups, as needed. We read poetry written by published poets in books, anthologies and articles gathered over the years. We showed them our own poems and poems written by other students. Then we analyzed the poems and tried to use what we liked to create poems of our own.

Meanwhile, I had students bring in cereal boxes which we cut into 5x7 size and painted black. I told them that if they would write seventeen Haiku of their own, they could make a book in which to bind them. SEVENTEEN?! That was too many! That was impossible! Megan and I made our covers and decorated them with Asian prayers papers, red ribbon, and gold markings. We bound them around chopsticks and hung beads from

the ribbon. They looked exotic and everyone wanted one. But there was a “catch”; you had to have all seventeen poems completed before you could make a book in which to bind them.

The students were allowed to work with a partner or small group, dictionaries and thesauruses were made available, and plastic sleeves with paper inside were used so they could write with markers, then easily erase and try again. As they began to try their hands at creating poems of their own, they got braver and braver to stand up and recite them, or try them out on a white board.

We stood back and were thrilled to hear even the most reluctant poets discussing how many syllables were in the lines, that the words didn’t have to rhyme all over, and much more. They talked “writers’ talk” without even realizing it! They looked outside at Nature to get topics; they observed the world around them to make it “theirs” in their poems. They became poets! They wanted to make a book of their own so they looked at writing poetry as a way to get there. They discovered that they could indeed write poems, that it wasn’t so hard, that they could be – WERE- successful poets and authors; they were making their own books to prove it!

We used only recycled materials and discussed environmental and recycling issues. We made handmade paper from our classroom scrap paper. The kids were “hooked”. They learned the process, had the materials at hand, and can now make the same type of book independently in the future. Many are doing that for other topics of interest, different genres, or just for fun. Some even planned to do a series. Old wallpaper books from home centers or decorating shops are great sources of interesting paper to use for covering the cereal box covers while reinforcing that recycling is more than glass jars and

tin cans. I felt that this new found confidence would be reflected in their feelings towards poetry. I ended with another survey and was happy see that almost all of the students had a more positive view of poets and poetry and of themselves as writers, as well as new insights about recycling.

Lesson two would allow a bit more freedom as students would be asked how they would like to creatively reflect a unit of study about Native Americans in Social Studies. Instead of doing a book, they could choose any means they liked, to cover a topic. The topic was Native American tribes, they were free to explore books and choose a tribe they wished to do. Together we created a rubric of information that we thought was important as a final assessment.

Multiple Intelligence questionnaires were explained and distributed. Students were asked to fill in the questionnaires and, upon completion, a discussion was held to review and interpret the results. In math, the results were graphed and comparisons were made as to how we feel comfortable learning. Groups were formed with different “intelligences” working together to do problem solving, each contributing different aspects of thinking and working. It was stressed that we all learn differently and that students were “free” to display their strengths and create a project that reflected not only the material in the rubric, but also their “intelligences”. We modeled ideas and showed examples of past projects, we brain stormed together for possibilities. Using recycled material was encouraged. Art supplies were made available to those who needed them. Students met with teachers to set due dates that seemed attainable and agreeable. There was more focus on responsibility, independence, personal creativity and subject content.

Students were anxious and proud to present what they had made, they were animated during their presentations and most projects were brought in BEFORE the due dates. You can imagine our surprise when one of our “least motivated” students brought in a seven foot totem pole! He gushed with information about how his tribe made them, how it compared to what he did and how we could keep it as a symbol of our class. His mother called to say she had never seen him so motivated to go to school before. Students were surveyed to respond how they felt about being able to determine their own project and assessment tool. Not all students felt comfortable having this much independence, but the majority thought it made learning more fun than just having to write another report.

Lesson three would be a math lesson in which a small pillow would be designed with a geometric pattern on the front, stuffed with balsam, and hand sewn. The pillow could then be taken home and used as a holiday gift. Students would incorporate lessons on using a ruler and compass, measuring and creating patterns and designs to make their pillows and then write a how-to book about making pillows. They already knew how to bind their own books independently. We played classical or soft music in the background and did this during the rushed and stressful holiday season. It is amazing to see even the roughest students sit quietly and sew patiently, intense and involved in what they are creating.

Mini lessons about proper usage of measuring tools were incorporated as we worked so students could relate the lessons to their real life situation. If they didn't measure properly, they would ruin their pillow, not just a math work sheet. It became important to them to know how to do it right. The totem pole builder went on to measure, design, and sew a purse from upholstery material for his mom. He brought in a special button for the

clasp and made a shoulder strap for the bag. I hope she appreciates the value of that “designer bag”.

How the lessons set the tone for further learning experiences.

These three lessons opened the door for student-driven inquiry projects – “Can I make a tri-corner hat like the colonists wore?” “Can I write my name in Braille to see how it feels?” “Can I ...” this list grew as their imaginations filled with ideas.

Student reflections were recorded through surveys, letters to the teachers and journal entries. Student input was expected, and assessed as part of each project. Assessments were made from student/teacher created rubrics that allowed for continued growth rather than just final assessment. The assessments were differentiated and multi-layered. Modifications was made not only for special needs students, but for all students during conferences with the teachers. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for their work and their accomplishments, and to set new goals. Strengths were celebrated and students were made aware that their need to work on areas of weakness is something different for each person, not a flaw or lack of intelligence.

Organization

As was stated, it was essential to keep student work well organized. Color-coding was very helpful. Each subject area was given a color so it would be easy for students to find and put back their material, as well as to make it easily recognizable to the teachers. And the room itself was organized into subject area corners, filled with materials that would encourage exploration and discovery. A file cabinet was set up for student works-in-progress, giving them a place that would keep current work out of the way, yet easily accessible. A teacher binder was set up, with space to include the reflections, responses

and assessments of each student so that conferences could be held easily and recorded, “on the go.” A section at the back was reserved for teacher observations and personal notes that could serve as journal entries.

Coordinating traditional and authentic lessons and assessment

As much as research supports hand-on learning and incorporating Multiple Intelligences, traditional lessons from the textbook and written assessments were taught as well. Students still need to learn to take notes, make outlines, write thorough answers, and take standardized tests; and teachers still need to prepare them for that. When alternate assessments were used, rubrics were created that could be used to determine traditional grades. If we were to, “live our question”, however, we would have to be able to use creative arts whenever possible and compare it to the lessons that were more traditional.

Teamwork

I speak as “we” because Megan was essential to this research and became a research partner as well as a team teacher. It was a wonderful experience to have the opportunity to team teach with someone who inspires you as well as the students, makes the teaching more exciting and fun, and truly works in tandem with you in all areas. I cannot underestimate her importance and my appreciation.

Supplies and materials

Arts supplies such as paints, markers, colored pencils, bookbinding supplies, scraps of material, needles and thread, corks, seashells, empty containers of various sizes, and many other such “treasures” were kept in a old TV cabinet that has doors that can be

closed. Students were free to add to the supplies or take what they needed. Many items from nature, such as pinecones and balsam were added as the seasons changed. Safety issues and expected behavior while “being creative” were discussed and reinforced.

Reaching out

From past experience as a “scrounger” I have found that there are many sources of “free stuff” if you are indeed willing to scrounge a bit. A local printer gave his leftover ink and greeting cards /envelopes from botched jobs to us, a paint store donated paint samples that were another order that didn’t come out quite right, an electrician gave us colored pieces of wire (you never know what you might need) and the 4-H leader gave us a supply of covered tins that was enough for everyone in the class to have one or two. It is amazing what you can get sometimes, if you just ask.

Meeting the curriculum

As we set up, we got more excited about teaching. The more we gathered, the more ideas we both got. We realized that we were not art teachers and that it was essential for us not to lose track of what we needed to cover within certain periods of time. The dreaded NJASK was a consideration and we knew there would be lots of practice needed to prepare the students for that. First, we went back to the original overview and fine-tuned it to be sure it followed the grade level subject area guide. That guide includes the state standards that need to be mastered. Then, we set priorities and wrote weekly lessons together. Megan concentrated on math and science and I did language arts and social studies. She has never taught fifth grade before so she felt more comfortable in her areas of expertise. Her background leans more towards math and science. I have been in fifth

grade long enough to have novels and support material that connect social studies and language arts in many areas, so I wanted to include the extras that I have gathered over the years. I have also been involved with the Columbia University Writer's Project and wanted to set up the writing centers to reflect the new ideas I had from attending their workshops. Together, we went over all the subject areas, modifying or sharing thoughts on what would work best before we wrote lesson plans together. This way, we kept aware of objectives and long-term goals that we had set. We knew we had to be flexible, but we also knew we had to stay on track.

Our teaching styles compliment each other and we team teach easily and naturally together, therefore we did not set exactly who does what, but rather let it evolve.

It was in this very "evolution" that the best lessons came forth for all of us.

Data and Analysis

Data collection began with student surveys that asked questions about how the students viewed themselves as writers and mathematicians, how they felt about each subject area and how they enjoyed learning, least to most. These surveys were conducted before and after units of study. Analysis began with a general reading of the surveys and recording, 1-3, least to best, how they felt in each area. The results were then compared and arrows used to mark whether they went up, down, or stayed the same. This proved to be a quick and easy way to record how they felt before and after a lesson or unit of study.

As time went on, students were asked to write responses in letter form, essays and open-ended question/answer form. Illustrations with labels, mind maps and self portraits were encouraged as well. The idea was to have each student reflect feelings about learning, about the subject or topic, and about themselves as we incorporated various

creative projects into our lessons. The analysis was kept simple in the beginning. Coding was kept to the 1-3 formats. As time went on, however, key words began to stand out: spelling, sentences, ideas in writing surveys and multiplication, division, difficult, not fast enough in math... Highlighters were used to mark the words that appeared more than once. Students, it seemed, were evaluating their feelings about writing in terms of editing and math in terms of operations and skills in which they needed improvement. Who they were as students, was determined by this. It made us open our eyes to see that they were merely reflecting what we taught them to do – look at where they need improvement. No one ever mastery or feelings, only technical skills. This was helpful to determine mini - lessons and making them aware of areas that needed careful watching, but it was not telling us what we really wanted to know – how do you feel about doing creative projects? A typical answer might be, “I like it” or, “It’s fun”, but we wanted to go deeper than that.

At this point we felt we needed to do modeling of what we would like them to do. It would be essential to our analysis to have something more personal so we would have to demonstrate that first. We wrote a few essays ourselves, then put them on the overhead projector and talked back and forth to each other in a way we hoped would show them more of what we wanted. We told each other about what we were thinking while we were writing, what we liked and disliked, referring to our technical skills as only a part of the process, not the main focus. All the while we tried to make the main focus our thoughts and feelings. We gave them colored pencils and asked them to try it this new way with a partner, then in groups.

Coding grew to include active participation, pre/post self-evaluation based on “what I know/what I learned”, “my thoughts about this are”, and “a connection I can make to this is” types of entries. As time went on, we were able to categorize more meaningful data because student responses became more meaningful. Once again, we used color coding to differentiate categories. Analyzing this data led to us discover much deeper things about our students. Instead of responding about their faults and weaknesses in technical areas, they were beginning to reflect in more personal ways. And that enabled us to see their views of learning and of themselves as learners, in new ways. From these discoveries we were able to differentiate lessons more personally as we got to know our students on deeper levels.

Eventually, our coding became a way of analyzing our own lessons because as we read their responses we could get a better idea of what “worked” and what didn’t. It encouraged us to do more reflecting on how we taught, not just what we taught, and we began coding our own lesson plans to see what we were doing and how we could change our lessons to include more of what they enjoyed doing. Instead of making a technical skill the main focus of a lesson, we tried to include emotional connections as well. We tried to make it deeper and more personal in the same way we were asking them to do that.

It was interesting to note that in the beginning, students placed spelling errors high on their lists of what makes a good writer, but, as time went by, spelling began to take a back seat to deeper things such as “expressing feelings and emotions”, “using my imagination” and “using metaphors”. As they began to look at writing differently, and started viewing themselves writers, their focus shifted away from considering the

technical skills as the most important thing about writing. Slowly, they began to consider at spelling as just part of the writing process. They began to think of themselves as “good writers” even if they were poor spellers. They began to separate technical skills from creative story ideas. You could always go back and fix the errors, but you needed the ideas and energy flow to come out at the beginning.

We began to make rubrics that included feelings and emotions as part of what we expected from them in their responses. It is hard to measure imagination so we labeled it as “original artwork” or “creative use of language” as we went along. At times, elaboration was something that we included in our coding because it was an area that seemed to stand out. We compared the use of descriptions and details with and without the use of a creative arts stimulant. We wanted to see if we could code their feelings and thoughts in regards to how much their elaboration revealed.

The coding became a way of seeing what the student needed as far as technical skills, but it also became a way of connecting emotionally with the students as well. We kept color coding as our means to differentiate trends and themes that we found to surface again and again. Quite often, we would add notes or key words to each other in our observation/reflection journals. We found it easier to compile one binder to which we both could add notes and reminders of things we wished to discuss at a later time. Post-its were used to flag concerns that needed immediate attention. While coding had started as part of the research project, we found it became an invaluable tool for us in many areas.

Findings and Implications

Having a large inventory of “treasures” was a good idea as we began to explore the idea of incorporating creative arts into lessons. Since both of us are “collectors” of, well, all kinds of stuff, we seem to have a never ending supply of things to stimulate the mind. The students loved rummaging through our treasure chests and since we never knew what would trigger an imagination, we offered brightly colored ribbons, seashells, old costume jewelry, magazines, travel brochures, cook books, feathers, bones (actually from a turkey dinner but the kids don’t know that) and many other objects d’art, as we like to call them. We would have liked to include caps and capes, top hats and bowlers, but because of sanitary precautions, we did not have personal items of clothing that were shared. A student did, however, make his own tri-cornered hat and insisted on wearing it to debate the Stamp Act because, as he told us, it was his “Colonial thinking hat”. The “Loyalists” decided to make themselves red vests from paper bags...and we were thrilled!

Many of our students do not have paper, pencils, crayons and scissors at home. The only exposure they have had to the creative arts has been in school. In kindergarten and the lower grades, these activities are used frequently, but as they get to higher grades, there is less and less time for such “kid stuff”. They are taught to write to picture prompts rather than to use their imaginations to create their own pictures of what they want to write about. Daydreaming is not encouraged, reversely, it is frowned upon. And yet, research in this field supports the importance of having time to do this very thing. We have found that allowing students time to think and daydream first was not wasted time at all, but just the opposite. As they explored the treasure box for items, colored pictures, looked through books and magazines, their minds began to buzz. You could not hear that,

of course, but you could certainly see it as they got an idea and their eyes lit up. And you could feel the energy as they came alive with something that related to what we were studying or got a spark for a connection or story. It became contagious. Self-discovery became real and fun, part of our classroom. It carried over as they went home and found their own “treasures” to incorporate into lessons. In fact, they came back and “taught” the lessons to the rest of the class!

Even the most reluctant students became more involved as they realized they could be successful in their own way. Many came from non-English speaking households and language held them back in their school work as they struggled to learn English and adjust to a new country and culture. Some came from resource room settings, never able to keep up in a grade level setting, feeling frustrated and angry. But as we allowed more and more alternative presentations and assessments, they realized they could be successful in this hands-on approach and that reading and writing were not the only markers of intelligence or success. They began to grow in confidence and took more risks, participated more actively, and smiled more readily.

Some of the most unlikely students became so involved with the creative process that they were able to develop and design their own projects around a subject. That made it so much easier for them to transfer knowledge about a subject to writing about it. And that made writing less intimidating to them. It changed their perception of the writing process and it changed their perceptions of themselves as writers. This became evident in the surveys and journal responses, in their daily work, and in their attitudes. Our data slowly, but surely, reflected these changes, but more importantly, we were able to see them

everyday in our classroom. Behavioral issues became almost non-existent as students experienced success in areas where they had never felt successful before.

In the beginning of the year, one of our students, Joe, demonstrated “anger management issues”. His IEP took this into consideration and he was to be given time to leave the room if he felt like he was going to explode. He had wrecked havoc in previous years, toppling desks and having uncontrollable tantrums. He became frustrated easily and had physical problems handwriting so he was allowed to use a laptop or have someone scribe for him. His homework was rarely in his own writing. And yet, he was one of our brightest students, asking thoughtful questions and adding many interesting facts during lessons, especially science and social studies. He would be one of our biggest challenges. How would he fare with what we planned to do? Would he become frustrated in projects requiring small motor skills? Would he be able to work in groups with others?

Initially, Joe worked beside a teacher, while in a small group setting. He was given a checklist and reward system for performance and behavior. He was able to earn points that allowed him computer time at the end of the day. We worked with him to practice deep breathing techniques as a means by which to calm him down if he felt frustrated. We allowed him to sit on the floor, yoga-style, if he felt the need. And, worse case, he could leave the room and take a walk down and the hall and back. This gave him some control and flexibility within our boundaries. The first month of school proved to be a testing ground. Joe learned we would be flexible enough to give him extra time or help in handwriting, but consistent in our demand for respectful behavior to all. If he wanted to participate in creative projects, he would have to demonstrate that he could control himself. Joe wanted very much to make that first Haiku book, but he didn’t want to write,

he hated poetry. We told him he could do just one Haiku, try it out. We let him work in a small group with strong role models that could help him, we allowed him to use a laptop rather than making him struggle with handwriting. After he got one done, his group praised him and we encouraged him to glue it on a page. Once he had one page done, he was sure he could do more, but not seventeen. Watching the others in his group make their book covers, however, was a big motivating factor. He controlled his frustration level because he wanted to stay in the helpful group, and he kept working because he wanted to make a book too. By the end of the week, Joe had seventeen poems written, considered himself a poet, and was one of the first to complete the actual bookbinding process. For the first time, he felt successful as a writer! He viewed himself differently and, to our surprise, asked if he could make another book!

This time, he wanted to use the internet and put together an informational book about thunderstorms, our science topic that month. Together we developed a rubric of facts that we considered important and if he could explain those, his book, we told him, could be used as an assessment instead of a written test. This was the first of many books Joe has created. As his confidence improved, so did his attitude. Behavior improved because Joe became involved in his learning rather than bored by it. He found ways to feel successful. In fact, Joe began to bring in items from home so he could “teach” as well. He had replicas of colonial money and tea tins that he wanted to show the class and use as props. He asked his grandmother to help him create a pattern from felt pieces and they created the tri-cornered hat. Joe wears it in class to help him ,”think like a colonist” as he argues the Stamp Act or develops his character for a narrative, set in colonial times, that he is writing. He already has thoughts about the design for the cover of his patriotic bookend

has a “series” of books about a super hero that he works on during his own time. There are days when we, much to our dismay, must tell him he has to, “stop writing now”, because we have to go on to another subject.

Editing, revising and spelling became important to him, rather than a hated chore, because Joe wants his published books to be the best they can be. His attitude has changed from being frustrated about not doing something right (and having tantrums) to viewing editing as an aspect of writing that is part of a process that “real writers” (like him) must go through to create their final copies. His work became important and it validates him as a student, a writer and a person. He recognizes his weaker areas and knows he has to work on them, but he now balances that against his successes in other areas and no longer has tantrums. He has gained confidence in his strengths.

We are hoping to build on this new attitude, giving as much encouragement and praise as we can, so that Joe will feel confident and ready to enter middle school next year. We find that his view of himself has changed and we hope he will continue to see himself as a successful student and be able to work to improve his weak areas and develop his strengths for the rest of his life.

Jim was another student that started the year as a behavioral problem. He talked out of turn, was rude and had remarks for everything and everyone. He did not like to follow directions and wanted to do things his own way. He did not work well with others and disrupted the class daily. He often did not complete homework or follow-through with assignments. Although he was not classified as a special ed. student, his spelling and writing were far below grade level. But, like Joe, Jim was bright and enthusiastic verbally. His basis of knowledge in many areas did not correspond to his written answers

and test scores. He seemed lazy and unmotivated whenever a written assignment was given. He hated writing and knew he was terrible at spelling and putting words together. But he was a good reader and comprehended what he read. He had many good thoughts and interesting ideas. We saw his potential and hoped we could change the direction in which he seemed to be headed. Luckily for us, his parents saw it too and were helpful and supportive at home, working with us to help him in positive ways.

It was during a lesson about Native American tribes that Jim started to change. After exploring which tribes they would like to research, we allowed the students to present their findings in any way they chose as long as it covered the items we listed on the rubric. We had created a rubric and checklist together, and brainstormed different possibilities for presenting the information for those that did not want to write a report. Timelines were established for final presentations, but students were free to explore creative ways to do the final presentation. The students were very excited at this new freedom and talked a lot about what they wanted to do instead of having to write reports or make posters. Jim got animated and excited, giving ideas to those who were not sure and coming up with ideas for himself, one more stimulating than the other.

Jim's mother called us in disbelief that Jim had spent an entire weekend in the garage workshop, working on his project. She had never seen him excited about school before! She would deliver the project as soon as it was finished as it was cumbersome. It turned out to be a totem pole that explained about his tribe – a seven foot tall totem pole! He brought it in before his due date and could barely contain himself as he told the class all about the people that made these and what it represented and how they lived. It became our class symbol and stood in a corner for most of the year. Jim found ways to express

himself through creative arts. He taught the lesson; he became an “expert” on his topic and his view of learning, and of himself as a learner, began to change. This was reflected in his responses to us, his journals and his daily work.

During the math lesson about measuring, when we created little pillows, Jim was the student that not only sat quietly for long periods of time while he was sewing his pillow, but went on to design and create a shoulder bag for his mother. When we asked him to write a “how-to” paper about it, he did not hesitate. The spelling needed to be checked, but Jim knew that and kept a dictionary close at hand. We asked him to bind it into an informational booklet so others could learn how to do it if they decided to make a purse. It became important to him to write properly and thoroughly. He was aware that spelling and sentence structure were his area of weakness and began to have peers or teachers check his work. He made himself a “words I use” book that was small and easy to put in his pocket, a personal reference tool. He didn’t look at this as a failure, but just part of the process. Good writers are not judged on spelling alone; he was a good writer who needed to check his spelling, that’s all. And that was a big shift for him. He initiated conferences with peers or teachers to review his sentence structure and help him edit. He worked efficiently and to completion.

Jim’s parents were so pleased with his turn-about in school and were so supportive at home that Jim came to school with confidence and a positive attitude instead of an attitude. Rather than being a trouble-maker, Jim became one of the best role models and leaders in our class. His creative energies knew no bounds and he surprised us throughout the year with creations that enhanced our lessons and made them come alive for the other students. He built a Liberty Tree to replace the totem pole when we studied the

Patriots and their fight for independence, he was interested in how a tree becomes a piece of lumber and did an independent inquiry project to explain that to the class with illustrations and graphics. He then used that information to establish an occupation for the character he was developing for a narrative set during the Revolutionary War. His journal entries and surveys reflected his view of himself as a writer and as a learner had changed from feeling like a failure to feeling like a success. Like Joe, he too recognized his weak areas as only part of who is he and how he learns instead of defining himself by his failures alone. He learned to see more of himself and liked what he saw.

The third student that I would like to discuss is Joan. She comes from an English speaking family, but English is not their first language. She is very quiet in class, finding it difficult to express herself in words, although English is her main language. In fact, she struggles to answer questions even though it is apparent she knows the answers. She is a good reader and comprehends what she reads, but her writing is often hard to understand, all run together and unorganized, as garbled as her speech. She often does not complete homework, loses assignments and materials needed for class, and is frequently absent. But she always carries a personal journal in which she draws and writes secretly.

The first Haiku books that we made were basically all the same. I had done this project before and provided the supplies and designs. There was little room for variation. But after the initial lesson in how to make the book, supplies were made available and students were encouraged to use them. Joan, usually a loner, writing secretly in her journal, joined the students who wanted to make another book. As she painted a cover or drew an illustration the other students began to admire her work. It was apparent that she had a talent. They began to ask her to help them do their covers or illustrations. It can

over to group work as well – she became our “class artist” and students turned to her to create artwork for posters and banners as well.

At this time we began to do mini lessons with her about organization of thoughts, of sentences and of her written work. Her written work became filled with metaphors and prose that was way beyond what we had been seeing before, but there was no punctuation and it was often out of sequence. But it was very creative and descriptive, very deep and thoughtful, sometimes almost scary in the depth she was expressing. And yet, she did not consider herself a good writer. Like the others, like we were finding from our data, “good writing” was only based on technical skills. No one considered imagination and ideas, thoughts and feelings as part of writing that could measure a “good writer”.

She did not enjoy writing to a picture prompt, she felt stifled by punctuation and worrying about how to start a beginning sentence that grabbed, an ending sentence that restated the main idea, transitions, and so on – she just wanted to write! And so we let her write! We told her she had wonderful ideas, unique metaphors and delicious descriptions. We wanted to read her work, we loved her creative energy! We told her not to worry about run-ons and punctuation – yet, we could go back and fix that later. All good writers go back and revise and edit, but not everyone could get out all that creative work. If, during writing she felt she wanted to paint or draw, or just lay back and daydream, that would be fine, we would consider it a “pre-writing activity”. (I secretly wished I could set up a hammock in the corner for her.) As she was allowed this creative “space”, she began to soar! She wrote stories and responses that filled us with wonder! She came alive! She talked more, participated more and interacted with the others more. Of course, we did ask her to go over sentence structure and punctuation and paragraph form as part

of her revising. It was during conferences that we explained how her work, creative as it was, now needed fine tuning to make it the best for her audience to read.

She began to understand that “good writers” need technical skills along with creative flow. Her sentences needed to be complete and she needed punctuation, but that alone was not how she would be judged as a writer. It was not all about technical skills, but technical skills were essential at some point. She could do it afterward if it stifled what she had to say. All writers do not work the same way. We would not want to stifle her creative flow, but she would have to apply the rules of writing afterward and edit and revise her work.

As time went by she began to write in complete sentences within her first drafts to save time. She said she realized that she needed to do that to do her best, so she would keep it more in her mind as she wrote. She added punctuation as well. We thanked her but made it clear that that was not the only way we judged her work. We often used her wonderful descriptions or metaphors as examples of good writing and as the other students looked to her as an artist and a good writer, her view of herself changed as well. Her verbalization became more organized just as her writing did. She also became more interactive with the other students.

Joan created a Loyalist character, made a paper doll version that stood on her desk as she worked on her Revolutionary War narrative and got so involved that she led a heated debate against Joe and his Patriots in the tri-cornered hats! It was wonderful! After that first debate, the students took sides and “became” Loyalist or Patriots. The Loyalists decided to make redcoats out of paper bags. In years before, no one ever even wanted to

be a Loyalist, they all wanted to be Patriots. This year was different and we stood back as THEY took over. I thought of the quote I had saved from literature review:

“I live by the saying that a teacher knows when he has done his job when his students no longer need him. In fact, when the student becomes the master and the master becomes the student then the teacher can truly be satisfied.” (Cruz, 2004).

The

The class was researching historical facts and developing characters that would have to be in Boston the night of the Tea Party. These stories would eventually be bound as their Young Author books. But this was the first time I saw students make costumes to wear while they worked! They were “living the question”:

“Would you be for or against the split from England?”

We filled the room with novels set during this time period and they devoured them, creating literature (guided reading) groups of their own, making text-to-text connections, text-to-self (the self being their characters) connections and text-to-world (the world being the 1770’s) connections. They argued amongst themselves, once again bringing the history lessons alive. Our position as teachers changed to that of peace-keepers, as we took a backseat to the “action”.

Our data collection at this time became observations rather than surveys because we didn’t want to interrupt the flow. Students referred to textbooks for facts and dates, corrected each other and actually read more on their own to discover things about that time period and the events. They checked books out of the public library, they went on the internet, coming back to tell us the name of Paul Revere’s horse, who the man in the belfry arch was, and many other interesting facts that I never knew. It just so happened that as they were learning to recite Longfellow’s, “Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” a commemorative stamp came out. I bought enough for the class and made taught them

how they could make them into pins to wear, a badge of courage for reciting the poem. One by one, they began to stand up to recite the poem so they could make a pin. Our resource room student proudly showed us a book about the clothes people wore during that time period. She needed that to help make her paper doll character look authentic, she told us. It was the first spark of enthusiasm or motivation that came independently from her that we had seen all year. She wanted to make a paper doll character like Joan's so she could write a story too.

After witnessing the enthusiasm and interest, we decided to carry this theme into math, using map skills as the vehicle to measure distances, time it took to travel from place to place during colonial times, elapsed time, longitude and latitude, and the importance of maps.

During science period we adjusted our lessons to create window gardens that grew herbs that the colonists might have used. We discovered how they used herbs for medicinal reasons and how much the world of medicine has changed since those days. We read about scurvy and the importance of vitamins, a varied diet and good nutrition for healthy bodies. It changed many of our lesson plans as we decided this was too good an opportunity to pass up. Lessons became intertwined and related to what the students could use and wanted to know rather than just what the curriculum required. We tried to meet requirements in different ways so we could satisfy those requirements yet keep the students engaged in their quests for information about the colonial period.

Methodology seemed to evolve as we went along. Much of what we ended up doing was not planned in advance, but came about as students became more involved in different areas that they wanted to explore. We found that as we opened to the paths in

which the students led us, encouraging and supporting them to take risks, they became more willing to reach beyond what was “the norm” and take new risks. It was exciting to get new ideas about what they wanted to learn. Sometimes, it was exciting to know that they just want to learn. As they got inspired to know more and try new things, we got inspired to teach them in new and creative ways. fairly, no matter what form it took.

As team teachers, we attended a state organized workshop about Inclusion and picked up many tips and ideas that we felt we could adjust to meet our needs. Sometimes a simple activity, such as folding papers differently can make a difference. When the presenter explained how he hated carrying heavy journals home and therefore found interesting ways to fold one sheet of paper to organize assignments, we jumped on this. We made “taco folds”, “hot dogs and hamburgers” and then let our students come up with “trap door” and “secret passages”. The folded papers were used to take notes, use as study guides and, sometimes, as final assessment tools. It became amazing to see how much better organized it made even the messiest of students, how easier it was to quiz each other and how much better they were able to do on final assessments. It seems so silly, yet it proved very successful. Sometimes doing the same old things in new and unusual ways is all that is needed. Instead of doing the same old note-taking, we tried to make it a fun activity. And, we found, students began to come up with their own versions that made sense to them and helped them organize other areas as well. They seemed to enjoy taking control, sharing their ideas, and went on to add color and design in many areas. They became more interested in the appearance and organization of their traditional notebooks and in their homework. While we had started out just wanting to try

out the folded paper technique from our workshop, we found it took on a life of its own and opened our eyes to the many ways this simple activity could be of use.

“Can we?” “Could I?” became mantras we heard over and over as students took ownership of their own learning. More and more we saw them express a desire to dig deeper and explore more of a subject that was of interest to them, or a new way in which to learn about it.

While we had hoped that having more freedom of expression would benefit all our students, we became aware that this was not the case for a few. The Asperger’s student is an A/B student, but once we allowed freedom of choice, this student grew agitated and did not perform as well. This student has problems connecting socially and emotionally, the very thing we were encouraging. It was necessary to modify some of the assignments and adjust grading to accommodate these needs. Some of the special education students diagnosed with ADD had to be monitored closely and focus re-channeled quite often. They often did not work well in groups as it was too easy to get off on a tangent, walk around the room and get distracted. Efforts towards accountability were not successful because they were well aware that accommodations had to be made for them. This raised many questions for us as we knew the students were capable of the tasks assigned, but our hands were tied by the IEP requirements for extra time, scribing, or other modifications. At times it was very frustrating to us because the students themselves took advantage of the very thing that was supposed to be helping them. It was helpful to have the flexibility to lengthen time blocks and allow students to keep the flow and energy going when a lesson needed extra time. Although we had two students who were pulled for resource room at different times, some that were pulled for reading, music lessons or

occupational therapy, having two teachers allowed one of us to work individually with a student while the other worked with the larger group. While we were always aware of curriculum requirements, we worked so much better being able to adjust our day as needed. One does not always know in advance when that will be necessary, but being able to expand an unexpected “teachable moment” is one of the greatest rewards of teaching. We appreciate administrative support in trusting our professional judgment and allowing us this freedom.

As this school year comes to an end, I feel that each and every one of our students is ready to make the transition to middle school. Some will continue to need support and modifications, some will continue to need small settings, but all have grown in self-confidence and in the knowledge that learning takes place in many different ways. They have learned that they have strengths as well as weaknesses and they have learned to balance and accept both. They have looked inside themselves and made connections to the world around them, the first step in being a life-long learner. They have discovered that learning can be fun!

If, by doing creative arts with our lessons, we can make the learning more fun and meaningful, stir the imagination and involve the students, then we should take the time to incorporate such creative crafts, allow for imagining and enjoy teaching students who want to learn.

Personal Reflection / Implementation

This year has been filled with so much to reflect upon that I hardly know where to begin. Looking back at the beginning of my research, I realize that I am questioning not only my thoughts about teaching, but my philosophy of life as well. I feel that I can answer many of the questions first posed, but that in their place are many more that will still need to be considered long after this paper is turned in.

First of all, let me say that I did not realize how selfish I was being when I questioned myself about sharing with another teacher. I'll admit that I did not relish the thought of rearranging my classroom, my supplies or my teaching to accommodate another teacher. How selfish indeed. Right from the start, however, we managed to redecorate our classroom together, making it "ours". We kept finding new and interesting ways to move furniture and share our materials. I found it was not so bad after all, in fact, I was enjoying it. Recently, we bought a book, Feng Shui in the Classroom that explains how to control clutter and have better "energy." We look forward to reading about this new aspect of classroom management together. In fact, we have requested to stay together as a team, in the Inclusion setting, hoping we can convince the administration to assign us together again next year. We feel we have more to learn, to offer and to accomplish than one year allows.

Because of the time involved in creating specialized rubrics and conferencing with students, team teaching has been an essential element in this project. We have worked together in all subject areas to introduce creative arts in different ways while still

maintaining classroom order, covering curriculum requirements, and differentiating lessons. It left us little time to interact with other teachers, but as we become more comfortable and established in our practices, we found we would like to reach out to the rest of our grade level, or across grade levels, to encourage more creative expression and interaction in all classes. We have considered developing and presenting in-service workshops that would better explain and model Inclusion for other teachers. We feel so strongly about staying together to pursue this that we have agreed we would go to another grade level, something neither of us prefers to do, if that is where an Inclusion class is needed.

This year has not only changed me as a teacher, but as a person. I have learned to be more understanding and patient, to listen, really listen, to lower my voice (I come from a family with deaf people and have always had to be loud and clear) and to take my time. I credit this to my team teacher. I could never have imagined the positive influence she would have on my teaching and my life. She is the same age as my own children, yet wise beyond her years in so many ways. It is with gratitude and appreciation that I write this.

I had very mixed feelings about the mainstreaming of special needs students into a grade level classroom, the burden it put on grade level teachers, and the disruption it might cause for the students. These concerns still exist, but from the experience I had this year, I found that all students were able to work to the best of their individual abilities regardless of the mixed group. Furthermore, all students learned about tolerance; they learned to see strengths instead of just weaknesses, abilities instead of just disabilities, and so did I. The realization that it didn't matter at what level a student was working for

them to work together made me realize that all too often we teach a skill, instead of a student. I learned to look at who they were, not just what they could do. So often we get bogged down with paperwork, meetings, and the bureaucracy of teaching, that it is easy to forget what drew us to this profession in the first place – the children. My research question, “What happens when creative arts are incorporated into lessons” made it possible to include many hands -on activities and projects that did not require a student to excel in verbal/linguistic skills, the benchmark we use in most assessments.

Our students were able to find new ways of self-expression and from that, new ways to build confidence. Gaining self confidence led to wanting to learn, and that leads to being life-long learners, a much more important goal for a teacher to have for her students.

Because of the time involved in creating specialized rubrics and conferencing with students, team teaching has been an essential element in this project. We have worked together in all subject areas to introduce creative arts in different ways while still maintaining classroom order, covering curriculum requirements, and meeting datelines. It left us little time to interact with other teachers, but as we become more comfortable and established in our practices, we would like to reach out to the rest of our grade level, or across grade levels, to encourage more creative expression and interaction. We have offered to develop and present in-services to explain and model Inclusion for other teachers. We feel so strongly about staying together that we have agreed we would go to another grade level, something neither of us prefers to do, if that is where an Inclusion class is needed.

Having materials and “treasures” on hand made it easier to inspire students to do art projects, but being organized was a necessity. While I am a packrat myself, I find I need

to have organization and order among the chaos. When things start to get too messy and crowded I find I get irritable. It makes me wonder how the students feel about disorder, does it disturb them? I can ignore works-in-progress, but not permanent disorder.

Unfortunately, most of the disorder is my own doing; I just have too much “stuff” in my room. I buy books, cut articles from papers and magazines, set up display centers and run off copies of work way in advance, thus needing space to store it. While this is done to supplement and enhance our curriculum, it got out of control and there were times I knew I had something, but couldn’t find it. Hard as it is for me, I began to de-clutter. It is an on-going process, but has carried over into my personal life as well.

Much to my husband’s amazement, I rented a dumpster and filled it to over-flowing as I cleaned out the basement, my closets and my art supplies. I made an appointment to see a nutritionist and began a safe and healthy weight loss/exercise program under her guidance. “Lighten the load” has become my mantra both in school and out. It has been an enlightening year for me in so very many ways. The research, although centered on “what happens when...” unexpectedly opened windows into so many other areas, both professional and personal. I now see that “Living the Question” will never end, it has just begun.

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