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The Andy Warhol Project with a Touch of B.F. Skinner

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Abstract:

This visual arts project was initiated at the West Virginia University Laboratory School (Nursery School) several years ago and has assisted children in reproducing prints of famous artists. Using the principles of behaviorism in conjunction with developmentally appropriate practice has helped young children to extend their knowledge in the visual arts. The Andy Warhol project was an extension of an earlier project where children were exposed to copies of famous art prints along with guided teacher questions to provoke interest and reflection. The thought-provoking questions prepared by the teacher were specific to each print in pursuit of helping children to obtain a more in-depth understanding. The teacher conversed about the artist and included appealing tidbits about his/her techniques for painting. The teacher documented the children's comments and attached them to the print that was hung in the classroom at their eye level for further reference. With children gaining experiences with the visual arts through careful examination of replicas of famous artworks, the teachers speculated about using behavioral approaches such as direct instruction to scaffold children's efforts of painting replicas. The goal of the subsequent visual arts project was to extend the current one by offering children additional opportunities to closely examine the print in order to re-produce it by using acrylic paints on a canvas. This addition of painting a print helped young children to focus on a task and lead to their sense of accomplishment and further their interest in the visual arts. Currently, the four-year-olds are studying and discussing the paintings of Andy Warhol: hence the name of the reproduction project. It was inspired by reading the book, Uncle Andy's: A Faabbbulous visit with Andy Warhol by James Warhola. The benefits of this project are numerous. In addition to children practicing new language and improving



their communication skills, they explored various art materials and media. Their skills in painting improved as overall manual dexterity were enhanced.



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Introduction

It is a difficult to imagine how Andy Warhol's artistic accomplishments and the teachings of B.F Skinner(1954, 1968) can merge in a developmental preschool to further young children's understandings of the visual arts, but they can. The art project was initiated at the West Virginia University Laboratory School (Nursery School) a several years ago and has assisted children in reproducing prints of famous artists. Using the principles of behaviorism in conjunction with developmentally appropriate practice to help young children become competent learners was introduced in the constructivist preschool (Warash, Curtis, Hursh, & Tucci, 2008) and is now used as a strategy to extend the children's knowledge in the visual arts. Initially, including behaviorism was an effort to give teachers additional strategies to implement with young children, primarily with children who need extra assistance in learning. The teachers of the WVU Nursery School integrated the Competent Learner Model (CLM)(Tucci, Hursh, & Laitinen, 2004), a program based on the teachings of B. F. Skinner (1968), with the developmental principles utilized in the Nursery School. Contrary to what most early childhood educators believe, blending the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and those of behaviorism benefit children and teachers. It affords teachers more options to direct children in specific activities in order to be successful in school. The idea of these two approaches confounded with the Nursery School's adaptations of the Reggio Emilia approach seemed to be a long stretch at most. While there are clear-cut contrasts between the philosophical foundations of behaviorism and developmentally appropriate practice there are also commonalities

such as the goal of creating independent learners (Warash, Curtis, Hursh, & Tucci, 2008). With the increase of a diverse population in the early childhood classroom, teachers want and need specific skills to assist all young children (Warash, Curtis & Morgan, in press) so strategies of behaviorism were implemented. In the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publication entitled, *The Intentional Teacher* (Epstein, 2007), Epstein states that teachers need a repertoire of instructional strategies to accommodate children's different ways of learning. This prompted the investigation of using behavioral techniques to assist children in becoming competent learners and extended into the existing visual arts program. The revised *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), supports adult-guided experiences where teachers take responsibility for directing and supporting children's learning. Head Start also acknowledges that teacher-directed approaches are an acceptable method in *The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes* (2003). Behavioral approaches can be used appropriately to help children who need to acquire skills which allow them to be successful. Children will obtain a more positive attitude towards learning if they experience success rather than failure. Mastering a skill or learning something new gives children pleasure. Elements of direct instruction and child guided activity can work together effectively (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The teachers of the Nursery School successfully used direct instruction, contingencies, and appropriate reinforcement to support children's success by changing behaviors that impede learning. The approaches of behaviorism and developmentally appropriate practice were successfully integrated in the preschool

not only to help children learn socially appropriate behaviors but to extend children's knowledge in the Visual Arts: thus the Andy Warhol project was born.

The Initial Project

The original project entitled, "Exploring the Visual Arts with Young Children" was initiated in 1999 (Warash & Saab, 1999). This long term successful project conducted with four-year-olds was based on the theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Parsons (1987). The intent of the project was to increase children's awareness in the arts by exposing them to copies of famous art prints along with guided teacher questions to provoke interest and reflection. The visual arts project consisted of thought-provoking questions prepared by the teacher specific to each print, ample art materials, time and resources, and the display of famous art work in pursuit of helping children to obtain a more in-depth understanding. In essence, questions were prepared by the teacher for each print which stimulated informal conversations among the children and the teacher. The teacher conversed about the artist and included appealing tidbits about his/her techniques for painting. The teacher documented the children's comments and attached them to the print that was hung in the classroom at their eye level for further reference. Children also emulated some of the artist's techniques in their own free lance paintings. This project continued with great success over the last ten years with some varied accompaniments and elaborations.

The Andy Warhol Project---First Step

With children gaining experiences with the visual arts through careful examination of replicas of famous artworks, the teachers speculated about using behavioral approaches such as direct instruction to scaffold children's efforts of

painting replicas. The goal of the subsequent visual arts project was to extend the current one by offering children additional opportunities to closely examine the print in order to re-produce it by using acrylic paints on a canvas. This addition of painting a print on to a canvas would seem to help young children focus on a task and would hopefully lead to their sense of accomplishment and further their interest in the visual arts. To begin this project of reproducing the print, the teachers decided to have children do one group reproduction where all children could participate. Children took turns painting to reproduce the print while the teacher used direct instruction and intentional teaching methods with individual children. The teacher chose *Fall Euphony* by Hans Hofmann as the first print for children to reproduce. A large copy of the print was made available for the children to review and discuss. The teacher wrote the children's quotes about the prints and read them back to them. *Fall Euphony* consists of various shapes and diverse colors and was chosen because of its simplicity. After much discussion with the children about this print and the artist, the teacher provided a canvas where she had penciled-in the geometric figures that correlated to the shapes of *Fall Euphony*. Children, using acrylic paints, picked similar colors to paint the corresponding penciled-in configurations on the canvas. To some early childhood professionals, this could be misconstrued as an attempt to have children "fill in" the lines as in a coloring sheet but this strategy was used to help reach a more in-depth understanding of the original print. The teacher's goal was to have the children observe the detail of the print and converse their findings. The penciled-in canvas assisted young children to observe the fine lines and patterns of the print. The activity was conducted during a free play time where individual children could choose to work on the reproduction.

The activity also gave children the opportunity to pick the equivalent colors as well as give them a chance to use various brushes. Each child chose the section on the canvas they wanted to paint and used the original large print for a reference. Most needed the assistance of the teacher to point at the print then the equivalent spot on the canvas. The teacher directed each child by giving the amount of instruction each child needed. Working individually with each child for a few minutes during free play time was rewarding to the children. Social reinforcers were an effective method in maintaining their interest. As with all project work, some children chose not to participate but as the canvas began to fill with color, the project attracted more onlookers and participants. The group painting resulted in a group creation.

~~The replica of *Fall Euphony* was completed and was displayed in the school. A subsequent painting was chosen that entailed more detail.~~

The next print to be painted as a group was the recreation of *Lily Pond, Harmony in Green* by Claude Monet. Most children were not intimidated by this print and felt they could reproduce it. The print was introduced to the children through a discussion of what they found interesting about the Monet. Once again, the teacher prepared questions but followed the lead of the children. To facilitate the conversation, the teacher had the child verbalize the colors he/she saw as well as any type of shapes, lines, and curves. Children analyzed the print by finding various shape configurations that existed. In addition to comments about the colors, the teacher helped them to notice the different shades of colors in the print. The techniques that Monet used were also discussed. The teacher used direct instruction techniques to facilitate the child's process. She explicitly showed the children how to use the brush by dipping it into the paint for the proper amount of

color. She demonstrated how the size of the brush affected the strokes. After initial instructions, children learned how to hold the brush and experimented with the proper amount of paint to place on the brush. To obtain the same hue, children were asked to mix colors until they reached the same shade. The teacher pointed to the colors in the print and helped the child discover the necessary colors to mix that would make the one in the print. Children learned to add white paint to bold colors to obtain similar hues. The children had all the necessary paraphernalia to recreate the print. The appropriate paint brush size was important in this project. The smaller the brush head, the more control the child had in dispersing the paint. Bigger brushes were only used for larger areas or the background. The use of small brushes contradicts what many early childhood texts recommend for preschoolers.

One of the difficulties observed with children painting the first print, *Fall Euphony*, was the child's inability to focus on the intricate parts of the print when they were painting. To help alleviate this, the teacher covered all but one small section of the print, *Lily Pond, Harmony in Green* with paper. This enabled children to focus on one small area to reproduce on the canvas. We referred to this method as the "paper defined method". Defining the area that the child was to paint allowed them to be successful in observing the details in that particular section. One time near the conclusion of painting this print, the teacher did not use the "paper defined method" but quickly returned to this technique because children were less able to stay on task and the motions with the brushes were more erratic. Each child who wanted to participate was allotted a section to paint. Other strategies were used as well. Sometimes the teacher instructed the child to start at a given point and would place a small dot at the starting point. For example if a line

was to be painted, she placed a dot and at the beginning of the line on the canvas and asked the child to start at the dot and paint as it looks in the print. If the child needed further assistance, she placed a dot as an ending point. After the child made strokes, she brought the child's attention back to the original print. This type of individualized scaffolding allowed the children to be successful and made the reproduction process less intimidating.

The group painting was accomplished during free play over several months as children were not rushed. This painting was professionally framed and presented to the new university president. It was hung with other works of art in the Blaney House, a reception room for guests of the University President.

The Andy Warhol Project—Step Two

After the two group paintings were completed, it was decided that due to the interest in the project, children could do their own painting reproduction. The 18 children could choose one of the three prints to recreate that the teacher picked for the project. First the teachers displayed and discussed the three prints with them so they had some background information. Most children chose to paint either *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold or *Bareback Riders* by W.H. Brown. The third option, *Young Artists* by Carol Sideman, interestingly enough was not chosen by any child. Even though it was more difficult to fully implement the "paper defined method" when the prints were not landscapes, it was still used as one of the strategies in the project. Because each child was completing their own painting, the teacher adjusted methods for individual children but at the same time remembering, that the proper amount of support that the child needs to successfully complete the task, is the best (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Some children preferred for the

teacher to place several dots on the canvas so they could connect them with their paint brushes. This corresponds to some children wanting the teacher to use dots for them to trace when printing a letter of the alphabet. This "connect-the-dot" strategy was especially useful when the painting contained many lines. The teacher simply placed a dot at the starting and finishing point. The teacher directed the child to paint in between the lines. Giving this type of direct instruction allowed the child to concentrate on the color and using the brush. The children using this method appeared to feel more confident in doing this task. This method also defined more closely what the child was supposed to do and provided the child with a satisfying result. If the child had difficulty connecting the dots, the teacher sometimes placed a straight edge of paper along the intended path. The more successful the teacher made the experience; the better it was for the child but the amount of assistance was determined by the child. For the individual paintings, the children chose the part of the print they wanted to paint at each sitting. While the child painted, the teacher would engage the child in conversation about the details of the print. As the child completed a section, it was put on the drying rack to dry and at each successive session. The child could pick another section to paint or add, embellish, or edit the sections that were already painted. It was interesting to note how children learned to focus on the details in the print. For example, one child examined *Tar Beach* so closely that he detected the color of the lips of the small girl flying in the night above a cityscape. He differentiated the dark green lips from the dark blue sky. He even told the teacher to observe closely so she could see it. Another little girl painting *Bareback Riders* scrutinized the print closely and was the only child to notice the clown pointing. Her enthusiasm for this project was evident

in her continued conversation about the print and her dedication to painting. She had excellent brush control but exaggerated her movements somewhat which was characteristic of other artwork she completed. Children still maintained their own personal styles when painting which was another interesting observation that the teacher noticed. Just as children have identifying marks and characteristics in their drawings and other artwork, this was also true in their reproductions of the paintings. The particular child who enjoyed painting *Bareback Riders* eventually made her own dots for the "connect-the-dots" strategy. Another child painting *Tar Beach*, painted the perimeters of the canvas and then filled in the enclosure. She made a conscious choice to complete this section of her painting this way.

To culminate this experience, an art gallery was set up at school to display the children's work to parents and others. The parents could purchase their child's painting at a minimal cost that would cover the expense of the canvas and the acrylic for subsequent classes. The children sold their painting to their parents by pricing them and using the play cash register. Upon completion of the prints and the art show, one little girl stood back and looked at her reproduction and said, "I am an artist, I am an artist".

The Current Project

Currently, the four-year-olds are studying and discussing the paintings of Andy Warhol: hence the name of the reproduction project. It was inspired by reading the book, *Uncle Andy's: A Faabbbulous visit with Andy Warhol* by James Warhola. The children were fascinated by the number of cats he had and the fact that he was from Pittsburgh which is a place many of these children have visited on a regular basis. With the children's interest in Andy Warhol, the teacher decided to

initiate the Andy Warhol project with his print entitled "*Shoes, Shoes, Shoes*" and "*Diamond Dust Shoes*". These prints offered a common theme about which children could certainly relate to, "shoes". The teacher displayed various pictures of shoes and children cut them out and arranged them on black paper. After they were glued they were hung in the entrance way and thus began the Andy Warhol Project which has become the name for the overall project on reproducing famous artworks. Currently, children are in the process of picking one of the Andy Warhol prints the teacher picked for the children to reproduce.

Young Children and the Visual Arts

In December of 2008, Head Start launched an initiative entitled "*A Head Start on Picturing America*", a subsidiary of the *Picturing America* program. *Picturing America* is a project of the National Endowment for the Humanities that provide high quality color reproductions of American art for kindergarten through twelfth grade students. *A Head Start on Picturing America* is a project that includes developmentally appropriate learning experiences and resources for younger children and families. This venture is designed to give parents and young children the opportunity to discover the *Picturing America* artworks through conversation, creativity, and sensory experiences (*A Head Start on Picturing America*, 2008). This well organized program includes 40 images that span centuries of painting, sculptures, and architecture and various works of art. *A Head Start on Picturing America* encourages discussions and experiences similar to the initial project of introducing famous prints and artists at the Nursery School. These types of visual arts programs give children the opportunity to engage the imagination and use previous experiences to further their perceptions in the arts (Eckhoff & Guberman,

2006). Background knowledge and experiences are just as vital to art viewing as background and content knowledge are in the acquisition of reading. One of the primary purposes of the Andy Warhol project and *A Head Start on Picturing America* is for the teachers to engage children in conversations about the prints as well as about the artists and their source of mediums. Young children need to have this content in order to construct new understandings. These understandings assist children as they encounter unfamiliar works of art. Having prior knowledge helps children construct new knowledge by modifying or editing one's understandings of the world (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). It appears indisputable from research that young children can gain insight from experiencing artworks but can the benefits be enhanced by young children reproducing famous artworks? The success of the Andy Warhol project of painting famous works of art revealed that children are ready for this and can benefit if done appropriately. Swan (2005) states a good program shows evidence of a rich fluency of ideas and concepts in the process and products of art produced by children. The Andy Warhol project has a gamut of ideas where children do produce a product. Children were purposeful and intent on completing their work. Cox (2005) through her naturalistic studies revealed that the way children organize their drawings is purposeful. Children can recognize the power of drawing to represent and they can be in control. In this project, children had control of their painting and the amount of assistance the teacher provided. Verbal commentary needs to be combined with drawing and painting as it did in this project where the teacher initiated a discussion until there was a back and forth level of conversation. Young children are capable of forming escalating ideas as they experience the communication of art. The visual arts help

children to think analytically. Young children practice and use new language as they observe and converse about the pictures (A Head Start on Picturing America, 2008).

Benefits of the Andy Warhol Project

The benefits of this project were numerous. Children practiced new language and improved their communication skills as well as their vocabulary. They expressed their opinions and ideas about the prints. The conversations with the teacher and other children were extended. They learned to observe and share those observations. They explored various art materials and media. Their skills in painting improved. By the end of the first group reproduction, most children were holding their brushes correctly and figuring out the amount of paint to put on the brush. In addition, they were learning to experiment to determine how to mix colors to match the ones represented in the print. They used various tools in mastering their prints. They took pride in their work. Children's attention spans were increased as they were persistent in this long term endeavor. They concentrated, observed, and conversed. They increased their manual dexterity. They problem solved not only the mixing of paints but the strategies they needed to be successful. They also had to figure out the best way to display their work for parents and other children which resulted in an art gallery at school.

In addition, children made progress in interpreting art prints as was observed in their conversations with each other and with the teacher. The teacher noticed more interest and amount of content knowledge increased as the project progressed. Parents were impressed with their reflective knowledge about the

artists and their work, especially when they recognized prints outside of the Nursery School.

Conclusion

The teacher learned to adjust to the dynamics of the classroom and to scaffold for individual differences. Using direct instruction helped children to become successful. One of the most intriguing observations the teacher had was the capabilities of young children and the use of direct intentional teaching to help children gain results. Early childhood teachers have been taught over the years to respect children's artwork by abiding to the statement "process is more important than product". This project did not deny this statement but takes it one step further by recognizing that process is vital but the product in this case is an incentive for achieving. Not all children were equally as enthusiastic in the reproduction of prints but this is true for any project. It can be stated that all children in this project produced a painting with 90% of those with a sustained level of involvement. Only two children seemed indifferent to painting their own version of the print. From previous research projects (Warash, 2004) that have been conducted at the Nursery School, when children have more repeated involvement with their own work where they can revise, edit, or continue work on a long term three-dimensional venture, their interest is more sustained and they seem to take a pride in their work.

Opportunity to reproduce famous artworks was successful in this preschool because it was just one piece of a complete visual art program. These four-year-old children had a year of prior experience with significant time to manipulate materials and to respond to many expressive properties of all types of media. As they began

the Andy Warhol project, they continued to use paints, clay, markers, water colors, and pencils, etc. to create a multitude of works of art. They continued to refine their skills with the materials that were available throughout the preschool day. The teacher continued to extend the child's language by helping them to reflect about their work. Their child-initiated art experiences were extended by the teacher through discussions as well as the use of documentation that was displayed with the artworks. But as children's fine motor skills were refined and personal connections made, and as symbols and representations began to emerge, the children were introduced to famous reproductions. As they gained experiences and connections with various works of art, the activity of emulating the prints was initiated and thus The Andy Warhol Project is now a part of the curriculum.

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