

# An Old Dog Can Teach New Tricks: Old Methods Can Be New Pedagogies

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## Abstract

Typically people believe that creativity must be generated from something new. However, in this paper, I will argue that an art teacher who wants to teach creatively in his/her class can do so by discovering something 'old.' I have selected two art activities that were used to introduce the creative process of interpreting historical documents of art educational history in a graduate course, 'Theoretical and Historical Foundations of Art and Visual Culture Education' at the University of Arizona.

The first activity presented the late 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial drawing methods of Walter Smith. The class was modeled upon Smith's teaching methods, but offered a wider expression of media options resulting in a dynamic classroom atmosphere, which generated a wide range of visual responses from class members. The second activity captures the concepts of 'the city as a social laboratory' and 'making a child's museum' from the progressive educators Anna Billing Gallup and Louise Connolly. The activity designer selected an everyday object, river stones, to facilitate students' abilities to generate and construct meaning. He wanted to demonstrate that ordinary objects could be used to build a museum in the classroom.

By analyzing these activities, three new perspectives will be seen from the research. First, creative pedagogy can be developed from old methods; second, thinking about how to adapt other's methods is part of the creative process; and third, one change can lead to many possibilities. My objective is to offer a new view for art educators seeking to implement new methods

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for creative teaching. In discovering the adventure of 'renewing' their knowledge, art educators come to explore other creative worlds.

**KeyWords: Creativity, Art and Visual Culture Education, Walter Smith, Child's museum**

## Introduction

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Typically, people believe that creativity must be generated from something new. As an educator, how to encourage students' creativity is an essential concern, particularly in art teaching. However, do we always have to search for something 'new' to develop creative teaching practices? In this paper, I will argue that art educators should free themselves of this constraint and explore the value of adapting and applying 'old' methods.

Like all educators, I spend a lot of time seeking out 'new' pedagogies for teaching, such as new curriculums, new methods, and new technologies. I adopt the notion of Davies (2004) that "teaching for creativity involves teaching creatively, to put it another way, teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their pupils if their own creative abilities are suppressed" (p. 5). If teachers want to maintain their creativity, they should seek out innovative and new practices and methodologies. However, after taking the graduate course 'Theoretical and Historical Foundations of Art and Visual Culture Education' at the University of Arizona, which taught by Dr. Lynn Beudert, I have also come to see the bias in such a narrow view of 'creativity' in art education and believe there is also much to be gained by looking to the 'old' to inform the 'new.'

In this class, every colleague was assigned a historical reading and was responsible for creating an art activity that was linked to the reading, which he/she would then present to the rest of the class. The other colleagues who were not presenting during that week would still typically have to design a small project based upon one of the readings. While it can be argued that the ideas that the class extrapolated from the articles might not capture the original authors' full intent, these activities helped students to critically rethink the historical methods discussed in the textbooks and to interpret them in a modern way. After reviewing these past art education methods in my efforts to generate activities from them and after tracing their historical rise and fall, I changed my former opinion that creativity has to come from something 'new.' The teaching methods those art educators advocated were, in fact, quite brave, innovative, and avant-garde for the time and they could still prove relevant today.

The activities designed by my colleagues were a further source of inspiration for me. Although every class member read the same readings, the idea each one brought out was quite different. I couldn't help being excited about the revamped ideas because I could see the creativity they inspired. Whitford (1993) points out that, "in considering any educational re-evaluation, we do not throw away good material merely because it is old, but we adjust and assimilate into the new program all good points found in the teaching practices" (p. 367). My colleagues are not only passionate students of art education but are also creative art educators. Through these renewed art activities, we could see that, as Zimmerman (2009) notes, "creativity can be enhanced and teaching strategies can be developed to stimulate more creativity" (p. 391). After this class, I have learned that creativity does not have to always be generated from "new things, new ways of thinking, new art forms, new designs, and new concepts" (Florida, 2002, p. 5), but also can be renewed.

For this paper, I selected two activities, which were presented in the class to introduce the creative process of interpreting historical documents in art education history. The paper then goes on to highlight personal communications with the activity designers and my experience as a participant in the two class activities. Also included are the activity designers' views on the historical methods they were using, where they got their inspiration from, and if the colleagues' reactions matched their intended goals, etc. Through the responses to the above questions, it becomes clear that the activity designers did not simply borrow past ideas from earlier educators, they also added innovations of their own to these old methods. Brief historical background will be provided for each art activity along with the class discussion that took place in order to compare differences between the historical cases and the modern thoughts of the class. The paper will conclude with my assessments of this class as well as insight into what art educators can gain by employing historical research as part of enriching current pedagogies.

## The first activity

**Presenter: Paula Kim**

**Theme: Industrial drawing**

### The art educational background

In the presentation, Paula Kim introduced the British art educator Walter Smith and his drawing methods from the 19<sup>th</sup> century based on the historical document *Teachers' manual for freehand drawing in intermediate schools* (Smith, 1877). Smith was hired in 1871 in the U.S. state of Massachusetts to establish for that state art instruction. In the United States, after the Industrial Revolution, there were economic and technological advancements along with a population growth due to immigration and an expanding middle class (Efland, 1990; Eisner & Day, 2004), and industrialists felt that drawing would provide training to pupils that would help the U.S. compete economically with Britain and Europe. Under this historical context, 'the Massachusetts Drawing Act' (1870) established free public classes for workers in drawing (Efland, 1990). Smith did not view industrial drawing as only training lessons for future draftsmen, believing that through displaying "accuracy of perception" people could connect with good taste and present products with artistic qualities (Clarke, 1885; Efland, 1990).

In Smith's opinion, "the simple elements of form should be taught in every primary school. These lessons in form started from the simple geometric solids—" the simplest objects that can be found" (Smith, 1882, p. 6). He focused on using lines, geometric shapes, and line drawings of objects, which became the fundamental training for developing industrial drawing skills (Stankiewicz, 2001); these methods are still very useful and broadly taught in the field of industrial design today. He specifically emphasized definition of forms because he considered it "can only be regarded as a rough process to illustrate principles, and has the same sort of relation to actual representation as the foundation of a building has to the whole and the parts of its superstructure" (Smith, 1873, p. 72). However, his methods were critiqued as being too complex for general teachers. Many teachers

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found it hard to follow both the texts and the books; they could use one, but not both. His methods were also felt to be redundant (Efland, 1990; Stankiewicz, 2001).

### **Activity: Smith Day**

The focus of Kim's activity that day was to capture and incorporate the technique illustrated by Water Smith in *Teachers' Manual for Freehand Drawing in Intermediate Schools*, in which geometric descriptions are used to teach students to create precise geometric shapes. In the beginning of the class, Kim gave every class member a plain paper and asked every one to choose the media he or she wanted to use from the media kits she provided, which included 2-dimensional media such as colored pens, colored pencils, crayons, etc. Next, she gave every class member a description note from *Teachers' Manual for Freehand Drawing in Intermediate Schools*. She wanted to determine if class members could accurately read the descriptions and have those descriptions of shapes be correctly drawn by others in the class. Unlike Smith, Kim did not restrict the media that the class members used to represent their shapes. When a class member read aloud the description of a shape, other class members had to draw the shape on their paper and then display the shape they drew to the class. For example, I read my description: "Line: a line has length, but no breadth or thickness" (Smith, 1877, p. 37) and then other classmates had to draw a line based on what I described. Kim said that she knew the directions were going to be confusing and even uncomfortable because it is not traditionally how we are taught today. Typically, we're either taught systematically or given an open-ended project, but she wanted to combine the two approaches. By allowing the class to respond to the instructions in whichever way they wanted, it allowed the class members to indicate their process of thinking by means of visual responses (P. Kim, personal communication, November 3, 2013).

My personal experience in this process was as Kim assumed it might be (P. Kim, personal communication, November 3, 2013). I was confused sometimes, especially in terms of some difficult words that I didn't understand. Although confusion could arise because I am an international student, I was sure that many young pupils would have had the same

difficulty as I had if they had not previously learned those words. For me, it felt more like taking a vocabulary test than learning art. After the drawing activities, the class members shared their feelings about following Smith's directions. Some thought the method was not so hard because it provided step-by-step drawing descriptions to depict the geometric shape. Some class members followed minimum instructions from the description note and created a shape in their own way as a way of being expressive, or even practicing their understanding of these elements and principles of art. In fact, although all of the class members listened to the same description, we all made pictures that varied in size, color, and angles.

At the end of the class, most of the class members agreed that Smith's methods were too rigid to foster children's imagination in art, but would be a perfect integration in a math class because he used many mathematical descriptions to form the geometric shapes. In my personal opinion, Smith's method is very suitable to design a warm-up art activity for teaching students how to draw geometric shapes. It can be further enhanced if art teachers combine this method with the use of other media, such as colored paper or toy blocks. Kim sought to offer more media options for her class participants, in the hopes of creating a more vibrant classroom environment. She felt that in the original class setting, Smith's students were likely not having fun or enjoying the lesson in only being allowed to use pencil (P. Kim, personal communication, November 3, 2013). Although Kim guided the art activity based on Smith's manual, she provided alternative media choices for class members, allowing for more creativity and greater variety in terms of color and style. By doing so, Kim achieved her goal, which was to alter Smith's stiffer classroom environment and teaching style by a more vivacious environment for class members.

### **Rethinking Walter Smith's Methods**

Through experiencing Smith's method of teaching art, every class member came to more clearly understand the context of the historical document. Just the slight adjustment of allowing for different mediums to draw with can help educators realize that even a small adjustment can

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refresh an approach in teaching art. There were two main difficulties we discussed in the activity:

1. The rigorous, singular-end, systematic approach seems to stifle the creativity and potential of students.
2. Some of the descriptions could be hard for students to understand.

If we consider the historical context, it may be easier to understand the educational style of that period. First of all, as mentioned before, American factories were eager to foster their own draftsmen in manufacturing design rather than spending money to hire European draftsmen. And an excellent draftsman demanded precision. This can help explain why Smith treated mathematical descriptions and procedures as important for industrial drawings. Secondly, unlike the majority of the public school students we define as the general public, the students whom Smith taught came from wealthier families (Kastle, 2001, pp. 15-16) and would have received a better education, including family tutoring starting at a young age. These students may have learned more complicated words that would be harder for the children of the general public to comprehend. With this context, it would not be so hard to understand why Smith's model of drawing was once so popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the criticisms of Smith's teaching methods by the following generation of progressive art educators, we still cannot ignore that his industrial learning style did have some dedication to art and design education. His model drawing can be seen in many present design schools for the basic training of designers. His methods are valuable and workable, but it depends on how educators teach them and in what kinds of schools their facilitation is suitable.

## **The Second activity**

**Presenter: David Romero**

**Theme: Progressive education and museum education**

**Art educational background description:**

In Romero's presentation, he addressed museum education in relation to late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century progressive education. The historical document he had to present was Hein's *Progressive Education and Museum Education: Anna Billings Gallup and Louise Connolly*. Progressive education developed in a period of social change after World War I, a time that led to transformation of the public schools (Hein, 2006). Museum education at this time was deeply affected by Dewey's concept of child-centered education and seeing the artistic process as the merging of self and the environment (Efland, 1990; Goldblatt, 2006).

Anna Billings Gallup was a founding member of the American Association of Museums. She believed that, "to be effective, the museum must put children first" (Alexander, 1979, p. 170). The other important woman in museum education in the same period was Louise Connolly (1914), who believed that the whole societal environment could be a museum. In this progressive educational atmosphere, the two women wanted their students to learn knowledge through hands-on activities that also engaged with the mind and achieved the social goal of providing access for all potential museum visitors (Hein, 2006). They dedicated their lives to the idea of constructing the "children's museum."

Borrowing from the idea of "the city as a social laboratory" (Connelly, 1914; Rexford, 1925), Romero sought to discover the extent to which class members could develop their own museums by applying their everyday experiences. Hence, he used four targets in Hein's article to form the framework of his activity (Appendix A):

1. Education needs to be the central focus for most museums.
2. Visitors need active engagement for learning to occur.
3. Museums can't miss the "value of opportunism" to create relevant programs.
4. Museums should embrace any effort to exhibit the everyday life of ordinary people.

### **Activity- Creating Our Own Classroom Museum**

In the class activity, Romero tried to input Louise Connolly and Anna Billings Gallup's concepts of establishing the museum that would be

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primarily targeted to capture the interests of children. The main purpose of this activity was to show the class that everyone could create his or her own museum even if it was just in the classroom utilizing ordinary objects (D. Romero, personal communication, November 4 & 5, 2013). Romero's intention for this activity was to encourage critical thinking and demonstrate that beauty could be found in everyday objects. He sought to utilize common materials to facilitate this activity, so he chose small river rocks as his medium in his presentation because the river rocks have their own unique sense of colors and forms. Furthermore, he felt that these river rocks would be readily available to children and could be collected on a walk with the class or while at play (D. Romero, personal communication, November 4 & 5, 2013).

At the beginning of the class, Romero asked every class member to choose 10 rocks from his plastic bag. We initiated our class discussion from the sheet (Appendix B) he gave to us. First, we were asked how we selected the stones that we kept. Almost everyone had different answers. Generally the answers were in terms of preferences for colors, sizes, outlooks, unique characteristics, etc. We learned that everyone had their own criteria for making selections, and the choices we made would relate to the things' color, size, pattern, texture, unique individual differences, themes or even the selector's personal emotion.

Next, we were asked to choose one stone, which stood out from our selection, and we had to think about what made it so unique to us. Responding to this question, the class members had to choose selectively because we were asked to empower it with special status. As part of giving the stone a special meaning, we had to explain the reason to convince other people why it was, in fact, special, even if it only appeared to be a river stone. Romero asked us how would we like to display our collections. Again, it related to another process of making a choice, which could also to be seen as a kind of meaning making. When the class members shared the arrangement of their stones, one person showed her collection by size, from large to small; one displayed the stones by groups of similar shape; and for myself, I made my selection as an array along a color gradient, from black to white (Appendix B). It was amazing to see how eight of us picked the rocks

from the same plastic bag, but we created eight different ways to arrange our selections.

Later, Romero asked us how we thought we could continue adding to our collection. Everyone was required to add five more stones to their collection. In this decision, a person might change the whole direction from his or her original theme, or like me, keep developing my original idea in greater detail. I decided to find more stones that contained various shades of black and white to perfect my stone collection's color gradient. The final discussion question of the activity was: "How would you interest others in your collection?" This question led us to look at our collections from another perspective and discover other things, which would be worthwhile for ourselves or other viewers.

I found the process of decision making to be inspiring, and it altered some of my pre-conceived notions of how one went about making a museum collection. During the activity, I knew that when we want to make an exhibition, we first must decide upon a theme for the objects that we want to present. Then, we have to consider how we wish to display the collection. One important thing I was reminded of is that every exhibition needs a focus. Therefore, I had to pick one object to be the centerpiece of the show, providing my viewer with a focal point from which to start. When Romero asked me how I would expand my collection, I realized that this question is where a museum starts. A museum has to assemble many collections in order to enrich the museum. Some museums will have a specific preference for their collections, such as a particular historical era or artist; some may just want to share their diverse collection with their audience. The manner in which a museum decides to expand its collections will influence the museum's future goals and direction.

By means of continually probing class members' reflections on daily objects, such as river stones, class members could easily build up a personal collection unconsciously. Romero successfully presented both Connolly and Gallup's educational claims by using a very simple but thorough conceptual developmental process. Through Romero's fascinating activity, I deeply experienced the question of: "How do we make our own

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meanings?” and reflected upon how to develop my students’ abilities to evoke their own meanings via objects in their everyday lives.

### **Rethinking progressive education and museum education**

The activity designed by Romero presents an old concept, but with a new interpretation of constructing a museum. In the thriving time of progressive education, museum education followed Dewey’s (2009) principles to build a child-centered environment. They cared about students’ self-expressions and their relationships with society. In applying Hein’s four focus points from the article, Romero successfully provided his students with an example of an ordinary object that could be infused with meaning and used to create a unique story. His activity also let students actively engage in meaning making, which was a learning process as well. While the activity at first may have appeared to be only about arranging some negligible river rocks, the whole process was in educating the students to think, to discover, and to develop their own perspectives in seeing things. All these outcomes exactly matched what Hein highlighted in his article. While progressive education does not enjoy the same mainstream popularity as it did in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its educational contribution and the concepts from that time still are useful for students in the present. The success of such programs for students depends on how educators design and present materials from everyday life. The old dog can teach us new tricks. There is still much to be renewed and learned from these ‘old dogs’ of education past.

### **Conclusion**

The activities discussed in this article demonstrate how is possible to renew a historical method as well as reframe a historical concept by incorporating key ideas of the concept. Both activities revealed valuable perspectives to enable the class, and, it is hoped, readers of this journal, to rethink how to be creative art educators. Despite the limitations in capturing all of the original concepts, the primary objectives or the two activities were successful and meaningful. This class assignment encouraged class members to rethink the relevance of historical methods in art education. It is

the focus of this paper to highlight how these two activity designers reinterpreted the historical in a modern way and inspired other class members to rethink historical methods incorporating contemporary perspectives.

Three critical points from the paper are summarized as follows: First, creative pedagogy can be sought from old methods. Those historical methods must have something noteworthy within them, if they were recorded in educational history. Some ideas are still very valuable and practical. For example, although Smith's industrial drawing was critiqued by progressive educators for its type of training, this kind of training is still applied in some form in most of the design schools nowadays. Second, thinking how to change and adapt methods is part of the creative process. The two activity designers both created project ideas from their assigned historical documents. In considering how to present the old idea in a modern way, the thinking process shaped their viewpoints on the historical readings and stimulated their creative processes. Third, one change can lead to many possibilities. During the activities, when instructors renewed the historical knowledge, they were reforming the class members' knowledge at the same time. The class discussion brought out many amazing and unexpected creative interactions. One question led to many reactions. Every class member benefited from each other's creative thinking.

I agree with Davies (2004) that, "the creative teacher will inspire creative learners" (p. 1). The participants of the class are students, but they are also educators when they walk out of the classroom. The creative development fostered by taking part in the in-class activities will be a beneficial force that they can apply within their own classrooms. While the ideas uncovered by the two activities were not original nor new, they did give the class members a chance to 'change' their thoughts and create their own meanings in the process. In my opinion, that is the process of shaping creativity. I believe that if art educators can realize that they do not have to singularly pursue something original or brand-new to facilitate their creative teaching, and spend some time reforming previous historical methods and practices, then they will discover that the 'old dog can still play new tricks,' and the adventure of 'renewing' their knowledge may take them to explore a different domain of the creative world.

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## Appendix A

### David Romero's hangout p. 3

David Romero  
ARE 630-Dr. Lynn Beudert  
Class Handout on Progressive Education and Museum Education"  
September 25, 2013

#### Progressive Education Today

- Progressive Education Association ends in 1955
- *Progressive Education*, the journal's final publication stops in 1957
- Schools that use Progressive Education Principles still exist today
- Progressive Education Theory, while it may not be completely embraced by public education, its practices and theories have not disappeared from the classroom
- The museum educator continues to use progressive education theory and practices

*"Effective museum education activities allow students to ask questions, interact with objects and explore the processes that lead to a richer understanding of the world." (Hein, 2004)*

Hein contends that:

1. Education needs to be the central focus for most museums
  2. Visitors need active engagement for learning to occur
  3. Museums can't miss the "value of opportunism" to create relevant programs
  4. Museums should embrace any effort to exhibit everyday life of ordinary people
- Hein challenges the art educators to continue to examine their pedagogic practices about human development in an effort to retain social relevance
  - Museum educators need to reflect on Gallup's and Connolly's accomplishments worked together to support the social goals of Progressive Education.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- How can Art Education continued to exist in what Hein describes as an "era of standards-based curricula and high-stakes testing?"
- How does social media influence Progressive Education Principles in a positive or negative way?
- What are the local social issues being addressed by museums in our own community?
- Do you think that the museum education programs currently follow closely what Gallup and Connelly envisioned for the future?
- What is museum education programming doing well today and what could it be doing better in the future?

## Appendix B

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David Romero's study sheet and my responses.

### 'Creating Our Own Classroom Museum'

How did you select the stones that you kept?

I want to make a gradient colors from black to white

What were your criteria for making the selections?

1. color

2. size

3. ~~shape~~ feeling  
(emotion)

pattern  
texture  
difference  
unique.  
theme

Was there one stone(s) that stood out from their grouping? If yes, what made them special to you?

Yes, this one is a little longer than others and has a sharper horn.

How would you like to display your collection?

By laying the gradient ramp. Black → Brown → White.

How could you continue to add to your collection?

Put more middle color inside the series.

How would you interest others in your collection?

Texture pattern shows on the stones.

It's much harder to make difference if we have things based on the most part of them were the same

concept - We can make our own museum.