

Problems and Strategies in the Teaching of Visual Arts Appreciation and Criticism to Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Cheung On Tam

Assistant Professor

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

E-mail: cotam@ied.edu.hk

Abstract

This paper reports on a professional support and research study on special school teachers teaching students with intellectual disabilities (ID). The aim of the study was to identify problems in and effective strategies for teaching visual art appreciation and criticism to ID students. A survey, several interviews (with teachers and students) and classroom observations were used as tools to investigate the problems as well as to identify effective teaching strategies. It was found that the ID students' difficulties in communicating, the teachers' lack of training in visual arts appreciation and criticism, and their conservative teaching approaches were the major problems to be overcome. It was evident that the teachers' knowledge of the subject matter and their planning of teaching strategies should be enhanced. Suggestions for effective teaching thus include linking art appreciation and criticism to art making, using everyday life examples, providing more opportunities for art interpretation using non-verbal means, and reconsidering the nature of art appreciation and criticism.

Keywords: Intellectual Disability; Visual Arts; Appreciation and Criticism; Teaching and Learning; Problems and Strategies

Introduction

**Problems and
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In conjunction with the transformation of the academic structure of senior secondary and higher education in Hong Kong in 2009, the Education Bureau (EDB) introduced an array of new subject curricula (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). The structure and content of the curriculum for Visual Arts, one of the elective subjects at the new senior secondary (NSS) level, have undergone substantial changes. For the first time, students with intellectual disabilities (ID) are entitled to study under the same curriculum framework as mainstream students, and guidelines published by the government (Curriculum Development Council, 2009) regarding curriculum planning, pedagogical considerations and assessment criteria have been provided. In response to the global trend towards inclusion, the EDB asserted that allowing ID students to study under the 'one curriculum framework for all' policy (Curriculum Development Council, 2009) would be an appropriate approach. Under this framework, the NSS Visual Arts curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities is flexible, coherent and integrated. It is suggested that teachers follow the general guidelines provided by the EDB, but that at the same time they are given the autonomy to customize their own teaching practice. To a certain extent, this policy can be perceived as a partial actualization of the principles of inclusion, and it is clear that the learning experiences of students with intellectual disabilities are becoming more 'mainstreamed'.

Similar to that for mainstream students, the NSS VA curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities is fundamentally different from the old curriculum in one major respect: it places a strong emphasis on art appreciation and criticism. Before the implementation of the new curricula, in the teaching of Visual Arts in mainstream (Ma, 1998) and in particular special schools, the emphasis was predominately on art making. Although some elements of art appreciation and criticism would have been incorporated in the art making process, they were not formally or methodically introduced in Visual Arts lessons. To prepare special school Visual Arts teachers for the

delivery of the new curriculum, the EDB commissioned the author of this paper to conduct a project entitled “Research Study and Professional Support for the Development and Implementation of the New Senior Secondary Visual Arts Curriculum for Students with Intellectual Disabilities”. The overall scope of the project was not limited to the teaching of art appreciation and criticism, but included the NSS VA curriculum as a whole. However, this paper will focus solely on the findings that are relevant to the teaching of art appreciation and criticism. The author believes that the current state of affairs in education in Hong Kong provides a perfect arena for examining the teaching of art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities.

The intention in this study was to answer two research questions: (1) What are the problems involved in teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities? (2) What are the effective strategies for teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities?

Models of Teaching Art Appreciation and Criticism

The early discourse on the teaching of art appreciation and criticism in the public education system can be dated back as far as the 1920s (Bennett, 1923). At that time the teaching of art appreciation and criticism to students was justified by the fact that students were more likely to become consumers than producers of art (Bottorf, 1947). Different models of art criticism have been appearing in American art education literature since the 1960s and 70s (Geahigan, 2002). Schools in Hong Kong followed these developments, and models of art criticism have been widely used as a means to teach art appreciation and criticism (Tam, 2007). The process/stages of art criticism commonly found in the models of Broudy (1987), Feldman (1992) and Anderson (1995, 1997) are frequently mentioned in the Hong Kong *Visual Arts Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)* (Curriculum Development Council 2003). Although there are some views that do not agree with teaching art criticism as a form of discourse (e.g., Geahigan, 1999;

Gooding-Brown, 2000), the prevailing strategies of Hong Kong art teachers are still involving students in discursive practices such as description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.

It is these highly language-based procedures for teaching art appreciation and criticism that worry Visual Arts teachers in Hong Kong, especially those at special schools. Wong (2004) pointed out that the two major concerns teachers have regarding art appreciation and criticism are their students' language proficiency and the connection in the public examination between art appreciation and criticism on the one hand and art making on the other. In another study, Wong (2007) confirmed that many teachers believe that art appreciation and criticism is inseparably linked to the use of language and that this linkage may directly undermine the performance of some students. This concern resembles that of many UK art teachers when Critical and Contextual Studies were first introduced in the 1980s (Hickman, 2005). Although students with intellectual disabilities are not required to participate in public examinations, certain kinds of internal assessment are unavoidable. In fact, the matter of assessment is only a secondary concern of special school teachers, and their primary concern is: how can students with intellectual disabilities learn art appreciation and criticism, given their compromised capacity to communicate in spoken or written language?

Research studies on the teaching of Visual Arts to students with intellectual disabilities are not uncommon; however they focus primarily on identifying and rectifying the difficulties students and teachers encounter during the art making process (Gerber, 2006, Hume, 1998; Schirrmacher, 2002). The idea of teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities under a prescribed curriculum is an entirely new enterprise, and my review of the literature suggests that so far it has not been researched. Only a handful of the teaching strategies suggested by the aforementioned literature are general enough to lend themselves to the teaching of art appreciation and criticism. Hume (1998, p. 116) put forward a list of supportive teaching strategies, including: (1) teaching in small steps; (2)

commending effort made; (3) allowing more time; (4) offering choice of materials; (5) communicating non-verbally, and (6) removing possible distractions. Schirmacher (2002) advised teachers to look at students' strengths before working on their weaknesses. Although these strategies are useful to a certain extent, more specific insight is needed to address the core problems and strategies related to art appreciation and criticism.

Methodology

The current study was designed as an action research study, in which the author, as an observer, tried to identify and put into practice effective teaching strategies alongside the teacher participants. The entire study can be divided into two parts: professional support and research study. Five teachers coming from different special schools were the key participants in the study (with the exception of the seminar and survey) (see Table 1). The five schools cater for students with different levels of intellectual disability, ranging from moderate to severe. With regard to the professional support aspect of the study, the author conducted two workshops in which the new NSS VA curriculum for ID students was explained and strategies for teaching art appreciation and criticism were introduced. The author then met with the five participating teachers three times to discuss and refine the teaching plans for two lessons which were to be observed. The professional support was in effect a form of intervention where new elements were introduced to the teachers so they could explore effective teaching strategies. Table 2 shows the types of professional support and the target participants. A mixed-methods research methodology, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, was employed in the study to examine the effects of the intervention and hence to answer the second research question. Table 3 presents the data collection methods that correspond to each research question and the participants involved.

Table 1 Background information of the teacher participants

Teacher	Gender	Age Range	Teaching Experience in Special School (Years)	Students' Level of Intellectual Disability	Professional Art Training
A	F	20 – 30	2	Mild	Yes
B	M	40 – 50	8	Severe	Yes
C	M	30 – 40	2	Moderate	Yes
D	F	20 – 30	5	Moderate	Yes
E	F	50 – 60	18	Mild	Yes

Table 2 Professional support and the target participants

Professional Support	Target Participants
Two workshops on the NSS VA (ID) curriculum	Every special school Visual Arts teacher in Hong Kong
Three meetings with teachers to discuss and refine their teaching plans	Teachers from the five selected schools

Table 3 Research questions, target participants and data collection methods

Research Question	Target Participants	Data Collection Method
What are the problems associated with teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities?	• All special school Visual Arts teacher in Hong Kong	• Survey
	• Teachers from the five selected schools	• Interviews with teachers (2 rounds) • Class observations
What are the effective strategies for teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities?	• Teachers from the five selected schools	• Class observations • Reflections written by teachers
	• Students from the five selected schools	• Interviews with students

Workshops

Two identical workshops were conducted by the author to ensure that special school teachers were better prepared for the NSS VA curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities. The workshops consisted of lectures, group discussions, hands-on activities, observation and critique of teaching

videos. The five main themes of the workshops were the rationale and approach of the curriculum, theories of art appreciation and criticism, integration of art criticism and art making, construction of portfolios, and the identification of effective teaching strategies. All special school teachers in Hong Kong were invited to attend. Seventy-one teachers from 46 different schools attended the two workshops, giving a school attendance rate of 87%.

Meetings with teachers

The author met the five participating teachers three times and helped them to prepare the teaching plans for the two lessons which were to be observed. Each meeting lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. Before the first meeting, the teachers were asked to submit a draft teaching plan. During the meetings, the author discussed the plans with the teachers and offered suggestions and comments on their plans. The teachers were encouraged to employ the knowledge and skills they had acquired from the workshops to refine their plans..

Survey

A survey targeting all special school Visual Arts teachers in Hong Kong was administered to identify the problems and difficulties in teaching the NSS VA curriculum from the teachers' perspectives. Since art appreciation and criticism is the main feature that distinguishes the NSS VA curriculum from the previous school-based curriculum in terms of content, a considerable proportion of the items in the questionnaire is related to it. One hundred and fifty nine questionnaires (written in Chinese) were sent to all the special schools (53 schools, 3 questionnaires per school) in Hong Kong. Twenty-eight schools responded and returned 54 questionnaires in total, giving a school response rate of 53%. There are 29 items in the questionnaires and they can be grouped into five categories: Learning targets accomplishment (C1), Overall curriculum planning (C2), Curriculum planning: integrating art appreciation and criticism and art making (C3), Teaching strategy: art appreciation and criticism and art making (C4) and

Assessment strategy: art appreciation and criticism and art making (C5). Teachers were asked to rate the difficulty of each item using a five-point scale ranging from least difficult (=1) to most difficult (=5). A T-test was used to test whether the mean score of each item was significantly different from 3 (the neutral value) at the 95% confidence level.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted to address both of the research questions. The author observed three NSS VA lessons from each of the five selected schools in order to obtain a detailed picture of the actual classroom environment, the teacher-student interaction and the teaching strategies employed. The duration of each session differs from school to school, ranging from a minimum of 60 minutes to a maximum of 120 minutes. During the observation, the author noted down the teaching strategies employed, the teachers' performance, the students' overall performance and their performance relating to art appreciation and criticism and art making. All the sessions were video-taped for the purposes of further analysis. The author used his professional judgment to derive related information from different components of the classroom observations to answer the research questions.

Interviews with teachers

The teacher participants from each of the selected schools were interviewed twice (in Cantonese). The first round of interviews was essentially unstructured and the teachers were free to talk about whatever came to mind related to the experience of teaching Visual Arts to students with intellectual disabilities. The second round of interviews was semi-structured. Many questions in this round of interviews were designed based on the results of the survey and the first round of interviews in order to allow for in-depth understanding of the teachers' opinions. For instance, each teacher was asked to express his or her view on the four items that were rated most difficult in the questionnaires: namely, 'cultivating students' ability in art appreciation and criticism', 'cultivating students' creativity and

imagination', 'moving towards self-directed learning' and 'catering for students' ability to integrate art appreciation and criticism and art making'. In addition, the teachers were asked to comment on the teaching sessions that had been observed. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated into English for the purposes of thematic analysis.

Teachers' reflection

The five participating teachers were invited to write a 500-word reflection on the various aspects of the current study that are relevant to the two research questions. Based on their experience of the two classroom observation sessions, they were asked to reflect on their refined teaching plans, teaching strategies, the impact on student learning and how these outcomes could be further enhanced.

Interviews with students

Nine students from three of the selected schools were interviewed. Students from the other two schools did not take part in the interviews since they had difficulties communicating verbally. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese and lasted for five to ten minutes. Some of the students were interviewed individually while others were interviewed in groups. The interviews were semi-structured and the students were asked to comment on the two lessons that had been observed. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated into English for the purposes of thematic analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Problems in teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities

To address this research question, three data collection methods were employed: a survey, two rounds of interviews with teachers, and classroom observations. Regarding the survey, the mean scores for 18 items in the questionnaire were significantly different from the neutral value of 3; of these

18, 12 items had means significantly larger than 3, and 6 items had means significantly smaller than 3 ($p < .05$) (see Table 3). This indicates that on average 12 items were regarded by the participants as difficult, 6 as not difficult and 11 as neutral. When comparing the mean scores for the 29 items, it can be noted that item Q1c ('Cultivating students' abilities in art appreciation and criticism', $x = 3.76$) was regarded as the most difficult and item Q3c ('Catering for students' ability to integrate art appreciation and criticism and art making', $x = 3.69$) was deemed as the second most difficult.

Table 4 Items which were regarded as difficult by teachers (mean score significantly different from 3, $p < .05$)

Item Codes	Items	Mean
Q1c	Cultivating students' abilities in art appreciation and criticism	3.76
Q3c	Catering for students' ability to integrate art appreciation and criticism and art making	3.69
Q2g	Moving towards self-directed learning	3.63
Q1a	Cultivating students' creativity and imagination	3.63
Q1d	Allowing students to understand the context of art	3.55
Q3b	Balancing art appreciation and criticism and art making	3.54
Q5d	Explaining the aims of the assessment to parents and schools	3.45
Q5b	Devising the assessment criteria for art making	3.44
Q4a	Devising effective teaching methods for art appreciation and criticism	3.43
Q4g	Using portfolios to enhance the learning of art	3.42
Q5a	Devising the assessment criteria for art appreciation and criticism	3.39
Q5c	Assessing the portfolios	3.35

In the following section, the results generated from the interviews, classroom observations and teachers' reflections are integrated, and certain specific problems central to cultivating students' abilities in art appreciation and criticism are identified. It should be noted that since the students were unable to provide answers that addressed the research questions, the results of the students' interviews are not included in the discussion below.

Teachers' lack of training in art appreciation and criticism

From the two rounds of interviews, the author confirmed that 'Cultivating students' abilities in art appreciation and criticism' (the item on the questionnaire that the teachers rated most difficult) is indeed the chief concern for many teachers. The teachers believe that their lack of professional training in this subject area greatly aggravates the problem. Teacher A said that:

when I was studying at the teacher college, art appreciation and criticism was not an important part of the curriculum. I therefore didn't acquire many of the necessary skills for teaching students art appreciation and criticism. Furthermore, it [teaching students art appreciation and criticism] is not very common in special schools. I find it hard to grasp art appreciation and criticism myself, let alone teaching such skills to students.

The curriculum and assessment guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2009) published by the EDB contains only broad guidelines and rather generic descriptions of teaching methods. Many teachers worry that they might misinterpret the content of the guide and consequently affect their students' learning outcomes. It is true that the curriculum guide defines visual arts appreciation and criticism explicitly as "all the processes in which students engage in direct response to the sensory appeal and critical appreciation of artwork and art phenomena created by their own efforts and those of artists from different contexts" (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 20), but inadequate examples were given to illustrate how such process can be applied to classroom teaching in practice.

Students' language barrier in communicating art

With regard to the 'direct response' put forward in the EDB's definition of art appreciation and criticism, teachers normally expect such a response to be expressed in the form of spoken or written language. However, for many

students with severe intellectual disabilities, the application of language is far beyond their reach. In some cases, from my observations, it was evident that the best the students could do was to nod or shake their heads. In the interviews, the teachers said that sometimes they had difficulties working out what the students actually wanted to express. For the same reason, they have no idea whether or not they are successful in putting their teaching across to the students. It is quite possible that a student may make some interpretation of an artwork but fail to communicate it to the teacher. For instance, when teacher D was referring to some of her students who are only mildly intellectually disabled, but who are physically disabled to the point where no verbal communication is possible, she said:

They must have their own thoughts and want to express them, but since they can't express themselves verbally, and that we have no means of working out what they are thinking. Guessing is the best thing we can do.

The teachers' queries raise a thought-provoking question on the nature of art appreciation and criticism. Is the use of language a prerequisite for art appreciation and criticism? Unfortunately, the answer to this question cannot be found in the curriculum guide published by the EDB.

Teachers' conservative approaches in teaching art appreciation and criticism

The teaching plans of the teachers reflected their understanding of art appreciation and criticism. Most teachers in the classroom observations chose a diversified range of artworks of different media and forms. This indicates that they are well informed about the various art forms and styles. However, their teaching strategies on art appreciation and criticism tended to be one-dimensional and were confined to the modernist approach. The questions the teachers posed to the students were very often closed-ended (e.g., 'Is this picture beautiful or ugly?') and therefore prevented the students from elaborating. This kind of question does not facilitate students' understanding of contemporary art which is usually open to interpretation.

In some cases in contemporary art, the processes of creating the artwork can be more important than the final product. This conception holds true for art appreciation and criticism as well as for art making. There is a need for teachers to renew their understanding of art appreciation and criticism and some of the more current concepts of art making. Post-modernist approaches to art appreciation and criticism emphasize the interaction between the artwork and the observer. The meaning of an artwork to an observer depends on his or her interpretation and there should be no single or model answer.

Failure to link art appreciation and criticism and art making in practice

Most of the teachers said they attempted to link art appreciation and criticism to art making and that they were aware of the relationship between and the importance of the two. The problem did not reside in their understanding of this relationship, but in the teaching strategies they employed to link the two in practice. Some of the teachers, although unintentionally, still employed the monotonous and traditional approach of dichotomizing art appreciation and criticism and art making. Most of their teaching involved a structured approach to teaching art appreciation and criticism followed by the teaching of art making. Very often, the teachers failed to identify a focal point for both art criticism and art making activities. This focal point may be an art concept, a visual element, an art movement or an art form. The teachers were not aware of the fact that there are no standardized modes of connecting art appreciation and criticism to art making. The method of linking art making to art criticism should depend on the teaching strategy and the actual classroom situation.

Unorganized questioning techniques

In terms of the questioning techniques they used in teaching art appreciation and criticism, it was found that many teachers were rather inexperienced and crude. Their styles of questioning lacked continuity and any logical progression. The following excerpt from one of the classroom observations is an example of this:

Teacher: What do you think about this?

Student: Good.

Teacher: Well done!

The teacher failed to organize the questions into different gradations of profundity and confined herself to asking very basic questions. The inquiry process was hence unable to move from descriptive questions to those that required analysis, interpretation and value judgment. Moreover, the teacher did not take the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and explore the possibility of asking further questions based on the students' responses. Consequently, the whole questioning process became very teacher-oriented, passive and non-interactive.

Substandard visual quality of teaching materials

Visual Arts, an experience related to the senses, aesthetics and creativity, is fundamentally visually based and the teaching of it should have a similar basis. Therefore the visual quality of the teaching materials for visual arts appreciation and criticism needs to be higher than that for other subjects. This is one of the keys to effective teaching and learning, since the visual quality of the teaching materials is directly linked to the students' attention. Very often, students with intellectual disabilities are less direct and systematic in giving out and receiving information and therefore require stronger visual stimuli and more time to acquire information, process it and give feedback. The author found from the classroom observations that there was plenty of room for improvements in the visual quality of the teaching materials, such as the resolution of the pictures of artworks. The poor quality of the materials meant that the visual impact and attractiveness to the students were weakened and so were the potential learning outcomes.

Effective strategies for teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities

As in the previous section, here, the results generated from the classroom observations, the interviews and the teachers' reflections are integrated in order to identify effective teaching strategies. These strategies are either those devised by the author to target the problems identified or those employed by the teachers. Throughout the different stages of the research study, the author and the participating teachers continuously identified and rectified the problems and other related issues that emerged along the way. It is in the nature of an action research study to arrive at solutions progressively; in the case of the present study, it was by evaluating and reflecting on the problems that arose during the course of the research that teaching strategies were gradually refined.

Linking art appreciation and criticism to everyday life

Form, expression and context are some of the basic directions for guiding art appreciation and criticism. From a formalist or expressivist point of view, art appreciation and criticism concerns the intrinsic elements (e.g., colour, tone, composition, etc.) of an artwork and the feelings that they generate. In contrast, when looking at an artwork contextually, one considers extrinsic elements, such as the historical, social, philosophical and psychological underpinning of the artwork. Most special school teachers prefer looking at artworks from the point of view of their visual characteristics (forms) and the emotion expressed (expressions). One reason for this preference is that these two approaches are more direct and involve less abstract interpretation. Another reason is that the teachers are probably not very familiar with the contexts of many of the artworks themselves.

Among the various contextual factors, those involving the students' everyday life are the easiest for students with intellectual disabilities to grasp. From the classroom observations, the author discovered that the students were more interested in things they are familiar with. Teachers can hence guide students to begin to appreciate and critique everyday objects. First,

these objects have an immediate attraction for students. Second, it is important to let students know that art appreciation and criticism is not confined to world-famous masterpieces alone. Teachers should take into account the students' life experiences and their everyday surroundings when selecting appropriate themes and artworks for art appreciation and criticism.

When one of the participating teachers was guiding her students in examining Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe*, she drew attention to Monroe's facial expression, gesture, and charisma in order to explain the concept of celebrity. However, since most of the students were not familiar with Monroe, the teacher compared her to a local pop star, Andy Lau, in order to explain Monroe's status in American society. Both these celebrities were very popular and famous in their time and news stories about them were widely reported by the media. The teacher asked the students whether they had seen images of Andy Lau in newspapers and magazines or on TV programmes in order to establish Andy Lau's, and hence Monroe's, significance more conclusively. By using this analogy, the teacher helped the students to understand one of the main themes of Pop Art – the tedium of the repeated use of mundane images in our daily life. Using students' everyday experiences as examples to explain the idea, background and meaning of artworks, teachers can aid the understanding of students and increase their interest.

Providing more opportunities for interpretation of art

Interpretation is at the heart of art appreciation and criticism. However, for students with intellectual disabilities, the stages of "literal description" and "formal analysis" are already difficult enough (Curriculum Development Council, 2009, p. 12). Interpretation, in a broader sense, involves speculating on the meaning of an artwork and providing explanations for such speculation. As mentioned earlier, from what the author observed in the classroom, the questions the teachers posed to their students were very much close-ended, and few interpretative questions were asked. First, teachers have to understand that there are no right or wrong answers to interpretative questions. When asking such questions, teachers should

emphasize their open nature (e.g., 'Which part of this artwork do you like the most? And why?'). If students are really unable to explain or elaborate on their initial answers, teachers can provide a range of relevant options for them to choose from (e.g., 'What do you think about the colours used in this picture? Do you think that they are boring, joyful or sad? Why?'). It is true that persuading students with intellectual disabilities to express their independent interpretative opinions can be hard work, but since there are no fixed answers to questions involving the interpretation of an artwork, teachers should be more open-minded and allow their students to experiment. For instance, when teacher E was asking her students whether they had heard of Marilyn Monroe, one of the students mistakenly thought of her as a local TV character. However, teacher E did not simply disregard her answer, but used it as an example to introduce the concept of public icons. Second, teachers should allow students to discuss and explore the meaning of the images, in addition to articulating their feelings about the artwork. Many special school teachers are conservative in their estimation of their students' capability to achieve this kind of higher order thinking. The meaning of an artwork is an open-ended question. Teacher should try to encourage students to voice their opinions. Depending on their students' competence and experience, teachers can decide whether or not they should be informed about some of the established schools of interpretation.

Reconsidering the importance of language in art appreciation and criticism activities

Many teachers believe that art appreciation and criticism is a verbal activity in which students use spoken or written language to provide feedback, analyses, discussions and critiques. The classroom observations confirmed the fact that language indeed plays a crucial role, and that this aggravated the learning difficulties for the students with intellectual disabilities. However, Geahigan (1999) pointed out that art appreciation and criticism is not solely a language-based activity since it involves students' individual response activities, research activities and the development of concepts and skills. Art appreciation and criticism is actually more of a

process of exploration. For a start, teachers should reconsider the notion of “response activities”. The students’ responses can take the form of bodily movements or the use of images and art-making processes. Teachers need to explore different, non-verbal means of communication for students who are not competent in producing verbal responses. In his written reflection teacher B mentioned that:

When the topic has been presented to the students, they should try to explore various media for expressing themselves, such as taking photos and making installations.

Teacher B also tried out various teaching approaches in an attempt to elicit non-verbal responses. One of these consisted of using activities such as voting or role-play to carry out art appreciation and criticism. He began the lesson by engaging the students in an online interactive game in which the mouth and eyes of *Mona Lisa* can be altered to demonstrate different emotions. Afterwards, the students were asked to choose from a selection of pictures of eyes and mouths and stick them onto the painting of “Mona Lisa”. They were asked to vote for the altered painting that they liked the most and to explain why they had chosen it. Towards the end of the lesson, three female students were asked to dress up as Mona Lisa and the rest of them were invited to comment on the three different “Mona Lisas”

Integrating art appreciation and criticism with art making dynamically

During the stage of art appreciation and criticism, it is useful for students to plan ahead and have a rough visual picture of their future artwork. Conversely, during the art making processes, students can benefit from being reminded of the relevant art theories and facts. According to my classroom observation, teacher A did very well in integrating the two. When carrying out art appreciation and criticism, she guided her students to appreciate the forms of different artworks and used their characteristics as examples to urge the students to think about the making process of the

artwork. During the art making process, she also reminded the students of the main points discussed in art appreciation and criticism. For instance, in one of her lesson, she showed pictures of different types of cuisine (such as sushi, dim sum, pasta and pizza) to the students and discussed with them the experience of tasting these foods. When showing the pictures, the teacher guided the students to look at the form, proportion and texture of the food and asked questions to prompt the students to think about and discuss the processes that would be involved in making the food out of clay. During the art making process, the teacher frequently reminded the students of these previous discussions to improve the quality of their works.

Conclusion

According to the results of this study, teaching visual arts appreciation and criticism to students with intellectual disabilities is problematic in various respects, and both teachers and students contribute to the associated problems. The students' inherent intellectual disabilities are the root cause of their compromised ability to think, learn and communicate. However, the author discovered that certain practices employed by the teachers not only failed to alleviate but sometimes actually aggravated the problem. These problems are closely associated with the teachers' professional knowledge of the subject matter, and the organization and selection of their teaching strategies and materials. To target these problems, the author helped the teachers to modify their teaching strategies accordingly. The author's contention here is that if such modifications to teaching strategies and materials are made, students with intellectual disabilities will be found highly capable of learning visual arts appreciation and criticism. Although the burden of introducing these modifications will fall largely on the teachers, with enhanced understanding of the subject matter of art appreciation and criticism and an enhanced awareness of the shortcomings of their current practices, teachers will be able to tackle the problems much more easily. One final remark regarding this study is that there is literally no published research literature on teaching art appreciation and criticism to students with

intellectual disabilities. We therefore urge art educators to start looking into this field, both for the sake of inclusion and in consideration of the beneficial effects of studying art appreciation and criticism.

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