EDUC 340

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All Teachers are teachers of literacy. This holds true even for those art teachers out there. Without literacy, people are less able to be functional members of society. The traditional word “literacy” focuses on the ability to read and write, but there are many other forms. When a person is unable to read or write they are said to be illiterate. The use of the word “ill” in illiteracy suggests that the person is ill without the ability to read and write. I believe that if a person cannot read or write in the culture they live in than they are less able to be a functional member of that society. As mentioned by Janet Seahorn, literacy is the best predictor of determining a person’s status in society. Status being economic success, where they live and who they associate themselves with. Over this semester I have been able to witness a variety of different literacy’s and determine methods of teaching in my own concentration of art. By witnessing a variety of different subjects and teaching methods, I come to the conclusion that all teachers are teachers of literacy’s.

To begin, I’ll give you a quick background that deals with my own literacy and why I chose to take the route of an art teacher. For myself, when I was young I had difficulties expressing myself with words so I used pictures. My visual literacy was more developed then my reading and writing literacy. As time progressed, I became literate because I used my visual literacy to my aid. I would draw pictures to help me understand a book or write a story that began with pictures then the words followed. Let’s fast forward to June of 2013 (right before I decide to get my teachers license), I am in Mexico traveling the coast with some friends. Realistically, if my friends would have not been able to speak Spanish, the journey would have been way more difficult. Whenever we ordered food or booked a room in a hotel, my friends would speak Spanish. I was very illiterate when it came to Spanish. My cultural literacy was strong back in America where my language was primarily spoken, but in Mexico I was lost. I remember feeling uncomfortable at times because I was unable to express myself. I bring this to light, because I have witnessed at the middle school, children’s uncomfortableness due to lack of literacy. Whether they are learning English as a second language, have a learning disability or process information different (visual learners, numerical learners, etc.), traditional reading, writing, and language skills can be hard to acquire.

When I started my lab at Wellington Middle School, I’ll be honest, I didn’t understand why I had to witness non-art teachers. My thought process, was “this has nothing to do with teaching art”. I was wrong. All of the different classes I witnessed emphasized to me the many different forms of literacy. I witnessed numeracy in Mrs. Logan’s science class, reading and writing literacy in all of the classes, visual literacy in Mr. Swanson’s art class and students who struggled with literacy because they had learning disabilities (Mrs. Bauldridge’s class). An instance that stands out is when I was helping a student named John-G in Mrs. Bauldridge’s class. When I worked with him, he had a hard time expressing his thoughts into words but when I talked to him in person he used impressive words like “consciousness” and “reality”. That to me, showed that he was cognitively aware of words and their meaning, he just had a difficult time putting them into words on paper. That transition from thoughts, to words, then to paper can be hard for many students. Mrs. Bauldridge would use differentiated teaching methods that grabbed her students’ attention and helped them actively and personally think about a subject.

Another example is when I helped a girl named Brittany in Mrs. Logan’s science class. Her and her classmates were working on a project that utilized a program where their peers could suggest improvements to each other’s work. I noticed that many of the students focused on grammatical errors and that surprised me because it was a science project. It goes to show that reading and writing are involved in all subjects. The project used numeracy by incorporating numbers and graphs. Certain students would use more than one graph because it was relevant to their learning style and they could comprehend the subject better by using numeracy. Visual literacy was also represented strong in the project. By using pictures, it made the writing flow and was easier to comprehend for those visual learners (like myself). The students also were strengthening their computer literacy skills by using that particular interactive software. Just in this one project, I was able to witness a variety of different literacies that Mrs. Logan was able to teach. Many of the literacy’s and skills students learned in that one project could roll over to other subjects like math, reading, writing, history and art.

When I think about my initial perception of literacy, I was ignorant. I did not see the overall picture of all the different forms of literacy. My favorite just so happens to be visual literacy but there are many other different forms. Whether it’s technological literacy taught in Mrs. Logan’s robotics class or visual literacy emphasized in Mr. Swanson’s art class, all teachers are teachers of literacy. With the new legislation in public schools, many teachers are required to primarily focus on reading and writing literacy. Reading and writing may be the backbone to literacy but there are many other forms of literacy teachers can use to improve students ability to read and write. For me, I was able to use visual images to increase my proficiency in reading and writing.

There are many literacy strategies and teaching methods I will use when I’m an art teacher. Many times, as an artist and aspiring art teacher, I get caught up in the art making process. With maturity and higher levels of thinking I have come to realize that the reflective process is as important as the creation process. When reflecting upon artwork, studying a particular art movement/artwork, and/or coming up with new ideas, there are many literacy strategies I can use to increase students learning. One strategy that I think any teacher can use but for an art teacher would especially come in handy, is the KWL strategy. By asking the students what they know (think they know), want to learn and learned, I’ll be able to understand my students better. For instance, if I’m talking about Salvador Dali and the surrealism movement he was a part of, it would be interesting to see if my students already know what “surrealism” is. If they don’t, I will know this by using KWL and be a more effective teacher. I can also see that once they’ve learned about surrealism if they would want to learn something else about it, perhaps how to make some surrealistic art. With the KWL strategy it informs the teacher and allows them to adapt their lesson plans to fit the needs of the students.

The strategy RAFT is something I can see myself using as an art teacher. Raft stands for role, audience, format and topic. This allows the student to use their imaginations and come up with new ideas. An example could be that I’m a futuristic data taker/artist (role) and required to paint a picture with descriptive words (format) for people in the present (audience) about what life is like in the future (topic). Many times artists already create “RAFT” whether they know it or not. The traditional self portrait of an artist represents their role, who it’s directed towards (audience), what mediums or methods they use (format), and the message they’re trying to express (topic).