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The Saturday Morning Art Classes for Primary Level Children: A Differentiated Programme

Jane Chia and Birnie Duthie

Abstract

In this paper we examine the purposes and background of the Saturday Morning Art (S.M.ART) Programme for Primary Level children which was developed in the Art Education Unit at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. It is a differentiated programme and we discuss the issues of selection for the programme, testing for artistic talent as well as the rationale, content and background of the project.

Within this context, the value of the programme for our students, the children and ourselves are discussed. Additionally, a theoretical basis which is supported by our practice within the S.M.ART project, is provided for art educators considering alternatives to testing for artistic ability.

Descriptors: Artistic talent, differentiation, art tests, giftedness



The S.M.ART Programme: Context and Rationale

In Singapore, programmes exist for academically gifted primary and secondary school children. Additionally, secondary school students have specialist programmes for Art, Music and Humanities. The programmes offer full courses to small numbers of pre-selected children and highly experienced staff are recruited to work in specialist facilities with a more liberal financial and time allocation than for regular schooling. No programmes deal specifically with artistic development in the primary school, where the general standard of art teaching is not at a high level with little or no equipment, large classes and minimal specialist teacher training.

With the approval of the National Institute of Education Council and the Ministry of Education, the Saturday Morning ART (S.M.ART) Programme was set up. The programme involved ourselves,

our Diploma in Education, Art Specialist students, and twenty four primary school children. Four nearby primary schools were approached, and they agreed to participate by selecting six children (three boys and three girls) at Primary 5 Level. This level was selected as it would not encroach on the important end-of-primary examinations at Primary 6, but would address the needs of children at the upper end of the primary school. Since our students when qualified would be appointed to either a primary or secondary school, this pre-adolescent stage of artistic development would also be most relevant for their understanding.

The programme was designed to diagnose children's individual interests and aptitude levels in a range of practical and theoretical areas within the context of a structured course, and to offer some individualized work in one particular area. Passow (1981) has suggested that the identification of areas of talent should occur within a programme which enable the traits of talent to manifest themselves:

"...standardized tests in language and cognition do not help identify a poet in the elementary school. Rather a programme of instruction and practice in creative poetic expression in different structural forms enables children with creative talent to reveal themselves." (Passow, 1981, p 122)

This is what the S.M.ART programme attempted to do. The programme had two phases: the first concentrated on a grounding of some aspects of two-dimensional art work with extensive monitoring and diagnostic devices, and which culminated in a group exercise; and the second on some aspects of three-dimensional art work culminating in individually negotiated and structured projects.

The research stance adopted was the case study, multi-method approach, which utilized the strategies of expert and group critical appraisal, self assessment, interviews and standardized testing. The students were required to work with the children, and to study their progress as part of the formal coursework of art education studies at the National Institute of Education. They were responsible for devising the final individualized work-units in consultation with the children and the participating art education staff.

The S.M.ART Programme is based on the belief that children with initial interest and motivation can excel to a high level of achievement in art if the appropriate stimulus, support and facilities are available. It is also based on current research in art education relating to personal and creative development suggesting that growth in creative and expressive skills is enhanced through access to knowledge, skill development and experience.

The framework of the Discipline-Based Art Education curriculum (Getty Foundation, 1988) incorporating studies in practice, criticism, aesthetics and art history was also used as a theoretical base. The S.M.ART programme is designed to include substantial monitoring and evaluation procedures to identify different levels of ability so that subsequent session planning could be done with a view to extending each of the children from the basis of their individual level of artistic development.

It is intended that all the children will benefit from the programme, irrespective of their stage of artistic development, because of the planned focus on their individual strengths and needs, the support of the monitoring students, and the benefit of working within a small group of interested peers. Since the programme is related to the aims and content of the Singaporean Art Education Syllabus, it is expected that the S.M.ART Programme will contribute to our students' development within their own schools' art education programme.

Although it has been commented by Clark and Zimmerman (1984) that existing theoretical models associated with gifted programmes do not address the needs of art teachers or artistically talented students, the rationale for this programme can be related to some aspects of these models. Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (1977) has features which relate to the construction of the S.M.ART programme.

General exploratory activities (as in Type 1 enrichment) are very much a part of the initial exercises in observation work, of exploring the potential of line, tone, texture and structure using drawing, printing and computer graphics processes to generate artwork. Reflective and critical dimensions are introduced through discussions and questionnaires administered and recorded by the students as in Renzulli's Type 2 enrichment. The investigation of real society-based problems (Type 3) is echoed in the major projects which are group works designed as art pieces for each of the four participating schools. The children were engaged in contributing actively to the decision-making processes regarding use of content, form and composition, and finally presented the results of their effort to their own principals.

The increasing levels of sophistication in the use of skills and development of content was built into the S.M.ART Programme, as children graduated from a more instructional-based response to one which clearly distinguished their contributions to the decision-making processes and which culminated with a negotiated, individualized work-unit. This relates to the Purdue Model's emphasis on basic skills building to productive thinking and project planning

(Feldhusen and Kollof, 1978). A relevant model is contained in Feldman's (1983) theories of cognitive development, in which students are seen to be part of a continuum moving through five regions cumulatively: the universal, cultural, discipline-based, idiosyncratic and unique. Of relevance too, is the work of Brent Wilson (1985) when he advocates the structuring and instructional aspects of art education:

"The Romantic dream of artistic individuality can only be realized by following a conventional path for at least long enough to realize that the route seems to end short of the unique places we have learned to imagine in the course of taking our conventional developmental steps. There is no magic way to circumvent the route from universal to unique (Feldman 1980) as the Romantics have so long wished to do". (Wilson, B, 1985, p 103)

In the limited time available for this programme (two eight week sessions of two hours duration) we expected children to move forward with the benefit of designed instruction and dialogue, particularly in the discipline-based phase. As Feldman (1983) stated: *"Children do not progress along the continuum without directive and intentional instruction."*

The strategies advocated by Clark and Zimmerman (1984) to help children advance along their theoretical continuum (naive to sophisticated) was also a useful underpinning to the programme as it emphasizes the need for a structured curriculum encompassing understanding, knowledge and skills.

Identification Procedures

It was decided that this programme should not, at the outset, try to pre-select children on the basis of their assumed talent in art practices. The children we involved were from several schools and had been exposed to a range of art experiences. Relying on art-centred tests, although suggested in the literature as a legitimate means of identification, assumes a common background in the field being tested. Our knowledge of the range of art teaching which the children would have experienced

suggests that such an assumption would be invalid and that conclusions drawn from the tests would be unreliable. We would be, in effect, testing the results of previous teaching rather than the children's ability.

Furthermore, there is little evidence to confirm that such pre-selection would enlist the potentially artistically talented. For example, Clark and Zimmerman (1984) suggest that currently available standardized tests fail to serve the needs of identification and selection. They also noted that there is no agreement on, or validated criteria, instruments or procedures that can be used in visual arts programmes for identification of artistically talented children.

As we had no external constraints on the selection procedures, we decided to adopt a policy of selection based on self-nomination, and to use various diagnostic procedures within the programme as a means of identifying the various ability levels. Clark and Zimmerman (1984) and Inglehart (1960) suggest that children's own desire and interest is probably the most salient indicator for the identification of the artistically talented. Using the self-selection procedure, we hoped to avoid a pre-selection by the art teacher as the first action, but to give schools the opportunity of determining the final school cohort. Studies (for example, Khatena, 1982) have demonstrated that an open invitation for teachers to nominate 'gifted' children has yielded very poor results. Our main 'identification' would therefore occur within the programme itself.

In our role as art educators, we believed that rather than attempt to train the schools' art teachers to carry out reliable pre-programme assessment on our behalf, we would use the S.M.A.R.T Programme itself to develop diagnostic and evaluation skills in our group of twelve specialist art education students. Each student was paired with two children (one boy and one girl) from the same school. Their task was to work closely with their charges, to observe their actions, to administer the questionnaires, to interview them and to evaluate the products of the programme and the quality of the programme itself on a week-by-week basis, using criteria previously discussed and agreed upon by the students.

To carry this out effectively, the students met every Saturday morning at 8.30 am for a pre-session briefing, and remained behind after the children left for a post-session discussion. Their end-of-course task will be to present a detailed case study report on the two children, fully documented with evidence from the triangulation of data.

Their on-going task at the weekly briefing was to contribute to the group discussion on the planned activities and to articulate the particular needs and capacities of their two children. The students were also responsible for devising the final individualized unit of work in consultation with their children, and with the lecturers.

Programme Content

What makes the S.M.ART Programme a differentiated programme for Singaporean children? The art curriculum in schools is based on a national syllabus which emphasizes materials-based activities with some stated emphasis on appreciation. In practice, the syllabi adopted by the largely untrained generalist teachers is to carry out the myriad projects presented in the Curriculum Development Resource books in a lock-step manner, with little planned, skills development. Most schools offer no common core of art materials, have few visual resources, and offer art lessons in generalist classrooms to around forty-four children in one hour sessions.

In the S.M.ART Programme, the children had immediate access to a trained tutor, had two specialist lecturers co-ordinating courses tailored to their needs, and had all the required equipment at their disposal. The sessions were planned to be cumulative, and they provided opportunities for individual extension and personal development in the latter part of the programme.

Six main art processes were covered: drawing and painting (including observation and imaginative activities); pattern and printmaking (including shape manipulation and printing processes) computer graphics (exploring image-making and manipulating with pixels) card construction, clay modelling and mask-making.

These are supported by two inter-related art education procedures:

- (i) making artworks (*practical*)
 - finding out about methods and techniques
 - understanding qualities of materials
- (ii) knowing about art
 - finding out about related artworks and their contexts (*historical*)
 - appreciating the qualities of some art concepts (*aesthetic*)
 - developing critical and evaluative skills (*critical*)

A theme of 'People in Nature' was the focus for Phase 1.

Phase 1 of the programme had the following sequence:

Unit	Content	Concepts	Media
1	Observation drawing skills	line & form	charcoal
2	Expressive drawing skills	texture	pen
3	Printing skills	pattern	paint
4	Computer graphics skills	pixels	light/ink
5	Field-trip - Botanic Gardens	pattern/shape	pencil
6	Joint mural project	composition	mixed media

The culmination of the first phase of the programme was a joint exercise which combined the children's completed works to form one large mural. The theme combined an investigation of themselves and the people around them with their surroundings (which in this instance was the Singapore Botanical Gardens) and integrated the work covered in the four specialized fields.

Phase 2, centred on the theme of 'People and Cultures' and followed this structure:

Unit	Content	Concepts	Media
1	Mask construction	form	card
2	Mask elaboration	colour	paint
3	Head modelling	form	clay
4	Extension modelling	decoration	papier maché
5	Final unit - devised in consultation with the children		

The second phase introduced the children to three-dimensional work in the form of ceramics activity and they ultimately engaged in an area of their choice in which they had shown particular skill or interest in developing further. Their work was finally exhibited at the National Institute of Education's ARTSFEST in November 1991, so that parents, principals and peers could observe the results of the S.M.ART children's efforts.

Analysis of the Data

At this stage in the work, the data has yet to be analysed in detail as we are still collecting information. For example, we are currently engaged in an evaluation of the S.M.ART programme with our students, having obtained feedback from the children and the schools. However, we are in a position to indicate the framework within which we will be considering our data. This framework encompasses three areas, namely:

- The socio-anthropological research approach in art education;
- Issues for art educators in the multi-cultural classroom; and
- Pedagogical issues.

The Socio-Anthropological Research Approach in Art Education

In the field of art education, there is much discussion about the most appropriate research approach to use in the multi-cultural art classroom (Wasson, Stuhr and Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990; Mason, 1988; Eisner, 1979; Anderson, 1979). This aspect of our analysis investigates the suitability or otherwise of our research strategy which significantly affected the nature and style of the S.M.ART project.

Data from the programme are being derived from a variety of sources and collected using a diversity of techniques which were considered appropriate to the nature of the work. We are engaged in an on-going investigation into the issues raised in teaching art in a multi-cultural

context and our approach is socio-anthropological in orientation. Using qualitative and quantitative techniques, students, lecturers and children were involved in observation techniques, interviews, questionnaires, accounts and the compilation of visually recorded information. From this material, case studies are being generated which will contextualize our work.

Case study research inevitably emphasizes collaboration and participation of those being 'researched' in a relationship of genuine partnership. The partnership in this instance involves trainee art teachers, lecturing staff and children. Collaborative research of this type is a relationship as well as a technique and as such, has implications for the role of the investigators. In this respect, our research strategy has much in common with the socio-anthropological orientation advocated by those writers who focus upon art education practices considered appropriate in the multi-cultural context (Wasson, Stuhr and Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990; Mason, 1988).

This socio-anthropological perspective is a feature not only of the research approach but also of the learning milieu and strategies we have intentionally developed for the Saturday Morning Art Programme. As sociology and anthropology focus on the study of cultures and societies this will have the advantage of contextualizing artworks for us as art educators.

Questions we will address in the final discussion and reporting of the work will relate to the success of the approach from the perspectives of our students and ourselves, the training and background required by our students in order to utilize certain research techniques, and to how the students develop as professionals from being involved in a research project of this nature.

Issues for Art Educators in the Multi-Cultural Classroom

There are numerous ways in which art educators should and could introduce the art of non-Western cultures into art programmes. Within the Saturday Morning Art Programme we diversified the nature of existing school courses and inserted ethnic materials into our sessions.

However, simply incorporating materials is insufficient as it decontextualizes the artwork and denudes it of ethnic and cultural value. Materials need to be developed which specifically address the issues of teaching art in a multi-cultural situation; this will form the next developmental phase of our work. The introduction of ethnic materials was accompanied by discussions on the significance and socio-cultural context of the diverse artworks presented.

Conceptual and extension strategies (Daniel and Daniel, 1979) were explicit features of the clay modelling session. Information was presented both in the initial discussion phase and during the practical activity as to the common purposes and functions of masks across cultures. Factors such as symbolism, ritual, the spiritual world and art as communication were central to the discussion on the universal socio-cultural aspects of masks.

This aspect of the teaching focussed on the: *"...ways in which art and design is understood as humanistic enterprise, can be said to constitute a form of values education and can contribute to personal and social development with particular reference to....the cultural domain"* (Mason, 1988 p 97).

Consequently, although some of the masks reflected the diverse Singaporean cultural context, there was also a range of authentic masks and images which reflected the purposes and value of masks from an international perspective. There is a need to balance the children's understanding of the significance of masks within their own multi-cultural environment with a world view of this particular artwork: *"Art education should not deny students their aesthetic heritage, nor limit them to the choices which come only from the cultural background of their birth"* (Congdon, 1986, p 147).

The S.M.ART Programme created legitimate opportunities for students to become aware of and to appreciate the aesthetic knowledge of various socio-cultural groups other than that of the dominant ideology, and developed a more inclusive basis for evaluating and comprehending cross-cultural aesthetic processes and production.

Pedagogical Issues

Within the Saturday Morning Art programme as a whole, pedagogical issues emerged which are of significance for us as art educators. This more holistic review summarizes the views and data collected from the observations, accounts and other research strategies and incorporates evidence from the children.

A pedagogy developed which was culturally responsive and reflective not only in content but in the teaching and learning strategies employed. A repertoire of teaching strategies which were appropriate to the needs of the children in a multi-cultural art classroom were consequently developed by us and our students.

Our approach was both structured and flexible in terms of developing art understanding, skills and background for the children. In this, the programme reflected the Discipline Based Art Education approach in terms of a framework which incorporated studio practice, aesthetics, art history and criticism.

From being lecturer and student-planned initially, the programme gradually moved to a more child-directed approach so that by the final unit of Phase 2, the children were selecting areas to work on and to extend. The shift in emphasis from teacher to child was also apparent in the grouping arrangements of the sessions. The intention was for children to move from initial individually based work to group activity and then to groupings based on the children's choice.

Learning strategies of this nature gave children more responsibility for their learning and encouraged them to pursue areas of art practice which were of personal value and significance. This significance may have been derived from any one of a range of socio-cultural contexts in which students operate, both within and between. This is a complex issue and these various socio-cultural contexts apply in any group learning situation but are particularly evident in the multi-cultural classroom. The contexts themselves may or may not be in conflict for our Singaporean children. They include :

Peer group and its resulting popular culture
 Ethnic group(s)
 Dominant group ideology
 Euro-American influences

The final units of the S.M.ART programme provided the children with the opportunity to pursue an aspect of art practice which was self-initiated and directed. This work reflected a variety of socio-cultural contexts, including peer group/popular culture influences which are seldom encouraged in art classrooms.

Extending the S.M.ART work from institution to community was considered important so that art activities are perceived as part of the wider social context rather than an academic exercise with little relevance or meaning beyond the classroom. This community perspective was promoted in a several ways. Various activities and projects were centred in outdoor work and focused upon the need to enable children to develop visual awareness of their environment and its potential for stimulating art activities. A major project of the SMART programme was a structured visit to the local Botanical Gardens which resulted in group mural panels which now hang in the children's schools. Additionally, as a culmination of the Programme, a selection of the children's work (where every child was represented) was displayed at an ARTSFEST organized by the National Institute of Education in November 1991.

For us as art education lecturers, we developed a more focused understanding of some of the issues inherent in teaching art in a multi-cultural setting. Our students reported that they learnt from us as role models in terms of structuring and organizing lessons, planning and delineating learning purposes and in evaluating artworks. In return, the S.M.ART programme gave us a controlled environment for monitoring our students' practice, understanding and skills

over a period of time. In contrast to teaching practice, where we as lecturers can exercise very little direction on the internal arrangements and practices of schools, this programme provided us with many advantages. It became possible to emphasize crucial pedagogical and socio-cultural issues within the context of a practical example. These issues emerged and were examined during the feedback time which followed each S.M.ART session.

Conclusion

For the children, the Saturday Morning Art programme enabled them to develop their skills and understanding within a framework of essentialist and instrumentalist aims from which the project was developed.

The S.M.ART Programme at the National Institute of Education was designed to provide a closely monitored, planned series of cumulative experiences for primary children which addressed the issue of teaching art in a multi-cultural context. From the children's perspective, such an experience was unavailable through the normal schooling system.

The focus on assessment, developing artistic talent within a context (Passow, 1981) feedback, and the strategy of moving from a basic instructional model to an active participatory model will help to ensure that the initial motivation and interest, which prompted the children's choice, is capitalized on and extended through individualized planning and programming. Although the programme is modest in scale, the results when fully analysed may provide some illuminating insights into the kinds of culturally reflective pedagogy which appears to be effective and appropriate in an art programme within a multi-cultural context.

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