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Understanding "the Other" through Art: Fostering Narrative Imagination in Elementary Students

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Abstract

Teachers in many countries live the language of standards although it is confined to uniformity and standardization. In the United States, for example, teachers teach to what is now called the Common Core State Standards that focus on students' college and career readiness while falling short of developing good judgment and wisdom. In this article, drawing upon Nussbaum's notion of narrative imagination, we address the following research question: How do we foster narrative imagination in elementary students in the midst of the external demands to meet standards? This research is conducted as "grounded practice" between a teacher educator and an elementary art teacher, who collaboratively created an integrated art curriculum unit, called Storytelling/Mural Painting Project, involving 68 fifth grade students, three storytellers

from the local community, and three classroom teachers. Based on our findings, we suggest a model for rethinking education in the age of standards.

Introduction

American teachers have been living the language of standards since the publication of the national report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which is known as the beginning of the standards movement in the United States (Hakuta, 2011; Sleeter & Stillman, 2009). Since the report, the language of standards became the foundation for education reform, urging states to devise and implement higher content standards and accountability throughout the mid-1990s. The main purpose of schooling in the reform those days was to bolster the U.S. economy and national security, culminating in the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.

The United States is now in a "third revolution" of the standards movement (Rothman, 2011, p. 7) with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) released in June 2010. The CCSS intend to provide a set of common standards for English language arts/literacy and mathematics for all states with an expectation to replace the existing state standards. According to the CCSS website (http://www.corestandards.org/), the CCSS, created based on research and international benchmarking, are supposed to help teachers and parents regardless of where they live have a common and clear understanding of what they need to do to help students succeed in college, career, and the global economy. The Common Core Standards Initiative (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2010) also states that these standards are not a curriculum, so they will not lead to a national curriculum. Since 42 states, four territories, and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS, however, the CCSS have been the current focus of state education policy in conjunction with the Race to the Top fund, influencing the curriculum, curriculum implementation and assessment in public schools. Hence, the CCSS have become the "new U.S. intended curriculum" (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011b), designed to clearly identify the academic knowledge and skills all students need at each grade level to be ready for college and career by the time they leave high school (Rothman, 2011).

There have been many conversations and debates about the quality and impact of the CCSS (see, for example, *Educational Researcher* (2011), Volume, 40, Issues, 3 and 4). As its goal is to "drive instruction by setting goals for what content should be taught" (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011a, p. 186), teachers in the trenches have indicated polarizing views on how to teach the Common Core, and many of them feel that this standards-based instruction undermines the agency of the teachers themselves (Martinie, Kim, & Abernathy, in press).

Rothman (2011) argues that the CCSS represent a "significant step forward in American education" (p. 11), while also noting that they are limited to only academic competencies, thereby excluding all other abilities students need in order to succeed in life. From Dewey's perspective, this limitation sounds like doing more harm than good. Dewey (1910/1997) warns that the emphasis on academic knowledge and skills would make the nurture of mind a "bad second" (p. 52) while escaping from fostering wisdom or good judgment. Hence, the efforts that teachers make or are supposed to make in addressing the CCSS may result in the mere securing of external results that are attached to correct answers, placing an emphasis on automatic memorization and accuracy of information, ignoring the development of personal attitudes and good judgments. Dewey states, "there is all the difference in the world whether the acquisition of information is treated as an end in itself, or is made an integral portion of the training of thought" (p. 52). When the acquisition of information becomes an end in itself rather than being an integral part of nurturing the habits of mind, teachers merely become the transmitters of knowledge and skills, who enforce rules of conduct that promote "docility, receptivity, and obedience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 18), creating "the gulf" (p. 19) between the curriculum and the students.

Similarly, Eisner also warns that adopting standards needs some careful consideration as the language of standards seems to be "by and large a limiting rather than a liberating language" (Eisner, 1998, p. 184). Eisner posits that to adopt a common set of standards for all is to promote uniformity in curriculum content that is questionable, because it fails to recognize differences among students. The aim of education, Eisner argues, is not "to train an army that marches to the same drummer, at the same pace, toward the same destination. Such an aim may be appropriate for totalitarian societies, but it is incompatible with democratic ideals" (p. 184).

We concur. We understand that education is more than teaching facts and mastering techniques of reasoning. Although such knowledge is deemed necessary, it cannot be an end in itself. We cannot become educated by simply amassing knowledge. Then, how do we teach our students to become educated citizens who acquire more than knowledge and skills for college and career? What should be the aim of education that is compatible with such democratic ideals and the ideals of wisdom or good judgment?

Theoretical Framework: Nussbaum's Narrative Imagination

We draw upon political philosopher, Martha Nussbaum's notion of narrative imagination to better understand what it is that educators strive to achieve through education, other than teaching to standards to help their students yield acceptable test results. Nussbaum (1998) argues that the goal of education should be to help students become world citizens who respect the dignity of humanity in each person and citizen regardless of differences of culture,

religion, gender, race, ethnicity, class, national origin, and sexual orientation. According to Nussbaum, the world citizen must "develop sympathetic understanding" (p. 69) through narrative imagination. According to Nussbaum, narrative imagination is:

> the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. (p. 11)

For Nussbaum, narrative imagination is a must-have characteristic of a democratic and cultivated world citizen who understands the lives of others beyond his/her local region or group. It is an ability to take the perspective of others consciously and compassionately (von Wright, 2002). It is through education that our students' narrative imagination can be cultivated for democratic citizenship. Nussbaum further posits that such cultivation should begin as early as possible:

> Education for world citizenship needs to begin early. As soon as children engage in storytelling, they can tell stories about other lands and other peoples. A curriculum for world citizenship would do well to begin with the first grade, where children can learn …that people have many traditions and ways of thinking. (p. 69)

Here, Nussbaum makes two important points. First, children are capable of narrative imagination through storytelling. They learn to wonder and imagine the world they don't know or they haven't traveled. When a child listens to stories and tells stories, they begin to wonder. Wonder is "a sense of mystery that mingles curiosity with awe" (p. 89). Hence, according to Nussbaum, storytelling promotes the habits of wonder or imagination that help children "see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist's interest—with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society's refusals of visibility" (p. 88). Second, cultivating powers of narrative imagination in children is essential to developing world citizenship. Narrative imagination, according to Nussbaum, helps students respond to another's needs sympathetically, which is an essential ingredient for a moral dimension. As children grow older, they begin to grasp more complex moral and social aspects of life, and they eventually become capable of compassion. Compassion refers to "the recognition that another person, in some ways similar to oneself, has suffered some significant pain and misfortune in a way for which that person is not, or not fully, to blame" (pp. 90-91). In addition, compassion requires "a sense of one's own vulnerability to misfortune" (p. 91), that is, a compassionate person is able to think, "[t]hat might have been me, and that is how I should want to be treated" (p. 91).

In short, educators should work on cultivating the child's narrative imagination that will help him or her develop empathy and compassion, that is, an ability to put oneself into the other's shoes, transposing someone's predicament to himself or herself. This cultivation of narrative imagination should begin when children are young, through storytelling and other artistic forms, so that children can grow to become world citizens in a democratic society. By teaching to standards, educators may be good at preparing their students to be "college and career ready," but may also contribute to developing citizens who have a difficulty in understanding those who are different from them, and some of who may end up becoming bullies and bigots.

With this backdrop, we attempted to address the following research question: How do we foster narrative imagination in elementary students in the midst of the external demands to meet the standards? It is an effort to find ways to nourish and foster in students the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, which is an essential disposition of an empathic person living in the changing and diverse society.

Research Design and Methods

Research Site: Westwood Elementary School[1]

Westwood elementary school where Anna taught is located in a small university town M in the mid-West with a population of around 52,000. It is a racially homogenous community that revolves around a major state university and military base, with approximately 82% White population. However, according to the district's website, Westwood is comprised of more diverse demographics than the town's composition, which is approximately 60% white, 14% Hispanic, 9% African American and 18% other ethnicities. In addition, 59% of students participate in the free or reduced lunch program and approximately 64% are considered economically disadvantaged (see figure 1). Academically, Westwood boasts their students' standardized tests scores that are above state average, with approximately 92% of fifth-grade students meeting or exceeding standards in all tests.

In the 2012/2013 school year, Westwood served approximately 550 students from grades kindergarten to sixth and our research participants were 68 fifth graders who were divided into three classrooms (see Figure 1).

[1] All the names appear in this paper are pseudonyms.

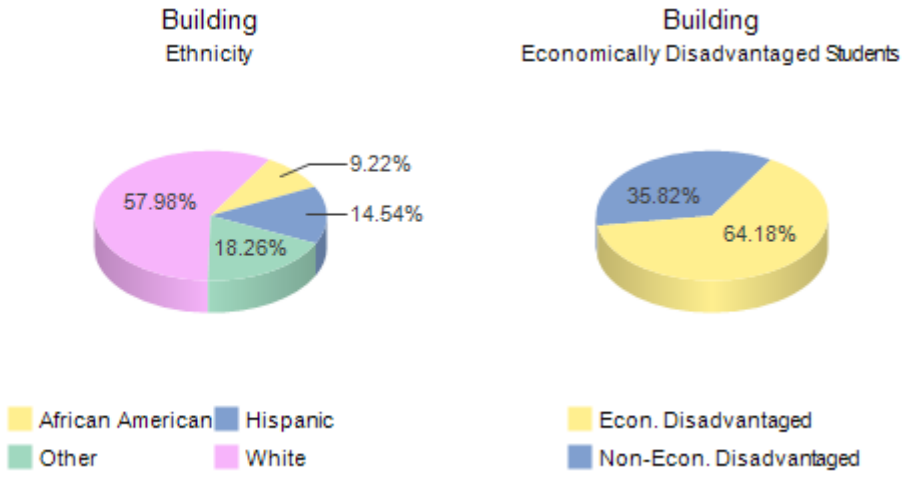

Figure 1. The demographic composition of Westwood Elementary School

Grounded Practice

We (teacher educator, Jeong-Hee and an elementary art teacher, Anna) first met in the fall semester of 2012 in Jeong-Hee's curriculum class in which contemporary curricular issues were discussed. In this class, Anna expressed her concerns about how her colleagues were preoccupied with standards and standardized tests especially during spring testing time while her teaching of art became increasingly marginalized and viewed as "frill" and "fun" rather than as a serious subject matter. Furthermore, research indicates that under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), schools that serve higher percentages of minority students and those who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, just like Anna's school, decreased instructional time spent on the arts and physical education to have more time for reading and math (Government Accounting Office, 2009; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). Rightfully, Anna was aware of the (negative) impacts that the current standards- based education has on curriculum and teachers' professionalism (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Kim & Abernathy, 2012; Macintyre Latta & Kim, 2008, 2011; McNeil, 2009).

Sharing Anna's concern, Jeong-Hee was also aware of the gap between research and practice, where teacher educators and practitioners are merely "looking at each other from a distance" (Pinar, 2007, p. 33) instead of working collaboratively. Hence, Intrator and Kunzman (2009) urge teacher educators to be engaged in "grounded practice," in which teacher educators conduct research on teaching and learning "not as detached researchers, but as authentic practitioners" (p. 514). In particular, grounded practice refers to a practice in which university-based teacher educators integrate their research and teaching into the K-12 setting. Some of the benefits of the grounded practice include: revitalizing self, relating in the present tense, fusing concept and practice, learning side by side, and earning credibility with

practitioners (see Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). For Jeong-Hee who used to be a high school teacher before becoming a university researcher, this collaboration with Anna afforded her to experience such benefits. It was an opportunity for "connecting theory, subject matter, and practice within a context" (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009, p. 514) and an opportunity to ground theory in practice and practice in theory.

Anna and Jeong-Hee both understood the importance of the role of education in fostering students' narrative imagination, but some issues still loomed large: How would it be possible to suggest a curriculum that would foster the narrative imagination in such a standards- and tests-driven school environment? More specifically, how do we receive permission from the school principal? It was "only by trying that such things can be found out" (Dewey, 1915/2001, p. 64). Dewey further advised us, "To refuse to try, to stick blindly to tradition… is to refuse the only step which can introduce rational conviction into education" (p. 64). Encouraged, we brainstormed to design an integrated curriculum unit, called Storytelling/Mural Painting Project, to be implemented for Anna's fifth grade students with three other teachers. We believed that there are several contributions the arts make to students' knowledge: 1) the arts address the qualitative nuances of situations; 2) the arts promote empathic feeling; 3) the arts make the provision of a fresh perspective so that our old habits of mind do not control our reactions; 4) the arts help us become aware of our capacity to feel as a way to discover our humanity (Eisner, 2008).

After carefully listening to our plans, Anna's principal graciously gave us permission on the condition that we would implement the new curriculum after the testing season was over during the period of March and April 2013. We also received an approval from the Institutional Review Board in our institution a few weeks later. Table 1 shows the components of the Storytelling/Mural Painting Project.

Table 1

Storytelling and Mural Project

Period	March-April 2013
Participants	68 fifth graders in three classrooms
Storytelling Sessions	Three storytellers were invited from the local community (One of the three storytellers included the muralist Mr. AM).
Writing Sessions	Three fifth-grade teachers guided the writing sessions in which students wrote reflections about the three stories they heard.

Drawing (Sketch) Sessions	Led by Anna (art teacher) and Mr. AM (muralist)
Painting Mural Sessions	Students created a three-panel mural that would be hung on the wall in the school cafeteria (led by Anna and Mr. AM).
Mural Dedication Assembly and Ceremony	Held for parents and community members

Below are more detailed descriptions of each session. All the processes were carefully recorded by Anna and shared with Jeong-Hee. Our research data also included all the student products from each session of the project.

Storytelling Sessions

Our project began with three storytelling sessions where each storyteller came separately in three consecutive weeks. Each session lasted about 30 minutes.

Mr. AM's Story. Mr. AM is a Latino who recently graduated from the local university and currently is the artist-in-residence for Casa de La Semilla (The Seed House), a non-profit organization that aims to empower members of its community to become leaders of collective actions that promote justice, equality, and sustainability. Mr. AM's position at Casa de La Semilla allowed him to fulfill the organization's mission through artistic engagement that often involved storytelling.

With the fifth graders, Mr. AM talked about his (illegal) immigration to America from Mexico and his struggle to become documented and eventually a lawful citizen, which included his time as a person washing dishes to earn money for his family. He also talked about how he became an artist and the types of art he creates, which included taking pictures of garbage on the street as inspiration for his abstract paintings. He discussed the importance of sharing stories to help people understand each other and his role at Casa de La Semilla. He described to the students the process they would be undergoing to create a mural beginning with listening to stories of people from their community. He asked the students to listen carefully to these stories so they can become the inspiration for the school's mural. Mr. AM explained that murals often represent the place and time where they were created. He shared with the students the work of Diego Rivera, a social realist, who painted murals describing the life of common people.

Mr. Alkary's Story. The second speaker was the parent of one of the fifth-grade students. Mr. Alkary was originally from Saudi Arabia and brought his family to this small town while he earned his Ph.D. He shared not only about his experience of coming to the United States, but also about his Muslim faith. When he first came, he did not know English very well, but

persevered and learned it quickly. He described how he always felt very welcomed in the United States and was glad to bring his family when he moved to this town.

Before he started talking about the story of Islam, Mr. Alkary noted that the majority of students did not know much about Islam, although most of them were familiar with or practicing Christianity. He described the tenants and practices of Islam to the students and had a PowerPoint to show the students things like mosques and people praying in Mecca. He described the mosque where Muslims in this town go to practice their religion.

Ms. Holm's Story. The final speaker was Ms. Holm, a professor from a local university and a descendent from the first black settlement in our state, Nicodemus. Ms. Holm described her experience as an African American growing up in Nicodemus and the town's proud founding and history. She began her story by first asking the students to stand up if they were of certain descents and ethnicities. She called Irish, African, Mexican, Indian, Native American, etc. Finally she asked the students to stand if they were part of the human race. All of the students enthusiastically jumped up. Nicodemus was first settled by a group of former slaves who heard there was land available there. Ms. Holm's relatives were among the initial group. She told the story of how the members of her family held important roles in the community, such as a grandmother who was the first postmistress. Many of the students were engaged when she told of sports heroes who came from Nicodemus including her son. She encouraged the students to try to visit Nicodemus, as it is a National Historic Site.

Writing Sessions

After each storytelling session, students returned to their classrooms and had a debriefing time for another 30 minutes with their teachers about the stories they had heard and completed a written reflection. This reflection asked students to fill out a chart with columns that said, "The storyteller said…," "that reminds me of…", and "I could represent this in a drawing by…" In addition, three classroom teachers worked with students on their essay writing based on the following prompts: *Describe a time when you met someone you felt was very different than you. Who was that person? How did you act toward them? How did they act toward you?*

Art Sessions

Art class usually met once every two weeks for an hour, but for this particular project, three other teachers contributed their instruction time, which allowed students to work on this project during three 90-minute- sessions for two weeks. During the art class time following the storytelling sessions, Mr. AM and the art teacher Anna together facilitated a more in-depth discussion on several mural images of Diego Rivera (see Figure 2). Mr. AM asked the students to look carefully and see if they could uncover the stories being told in the mural.

Students were asked to analyze several murals focusing on the overall themes and how the artists created symbols (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Diego Rivera Mural: Man Controller of the Universe

After the mural discussions, students were asked to create a mind map followed by a reflective drawing on each storyteller's story. The students were eager to begin. A few balked at the idea of no stick figures and extreme details, but still put forth great effort knowing that Mr. AM would look through their sketches to create the final plan for the mural. The students were informed that some of their ideas would be incorporated in the final mural that they were going to create in collaboration with the muralist and the art teacher (see Figure 3). After brainstorming with the muralist, students decided that they wanted their murals to represent all the people in the community and to show how their school was welcoming to everyone.

Figure 3. Fifth Gradrs Working on Sketches

Working on the Three-Panel Mural

In preparation for the students' mural painting, Mr. AM and the art teacher prepared the mural boards. Mr. AM combined several of the students' sketches into a three-panel mural. Due to space constraints, only one class at a time could work in the art room. The size of the murals also limited the number of students painting at a given time. Therefore, the following week, each class came to the art room for three days working for one hour each day. The class was then divided into two groups. One group would be painting the mural with Mr. AM while the other group would be completing some additional reflections with the art teacher. The painting groups were directed by Mr. AM to fill in specific colors in the sketch he created on each mural board. Each board was 4 foot by 8 foot. Students worked in groups of 4-5 on a single board. Mr. AM instructed them to paint very carefully and be respectful of each other's areas. Students would need to discuss a plan as their spaces began to intersect.

Figure 4. Fifth Graders Working on a Mural Panel

Mural Dedication Assembly and Ceremony

When the students finished painting the mural, Mr. AM put a few finishing touches on it and it was hung in Westwood's cafeteria (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). The cafeteria was chosen as one of the most communal places in the school. Every student utilized that space daily and it was often used for community events after school.

The following day, there was an all-school assembly to dedicate the mural. Many parents also attended this assembly. Mr. AM spoke to the school and described the process. Several of the students stood up and read their reflections to the school. That evening, another dedication ceremony was held that invited students, parents, and community members to see the mural

and enjoy refreshments. The principal, the art teacher, and Mr. AM spoke about the mural and storytelling process. Several students shared their reflections again.

Figure 5. One of the Three Mural Panels hung in the school cafeteria

Figure 6. Three mural panels hung in the school cafeteria

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The Storytelling/Mural Project, an integrated art curriculum unit that involved the collaborative processes of storytelling, writing, listening, brainstorming, mind-mapping, drawing, and painting, have produced much data for us to analyze. We had 68 fifth graders' sketches, drawings, mind-maps, and writings, respectively. In our analysis, we focused on what students might have learned through the project in relation to our research question: How do we foster narrative imagination in elementary students in the midst of the external demands to meet the standards?

Below, we will present the following students' learning outcomes: 1) Learning outcomes reflected in drawings; 2) Learning outcomes reflected in short writings; 3) Learning outcomes reflected in students' stories; 4) Unexpected outcomes; and 5) Students' desire to change.

Learning Outcomes Reflected in Drawings

The following drawings are descriptive of what students learned from the storytellers. They indicate students' learning about immigration, religion, and Black settlement history, which are told by the three storytellers living in the local community. Students' drawings that are represented here reflect that our fifth graders understood the storytellers' lived experiences. They were able to express what they heard, including the emotions and historical facts.

In particular, Figure 7 below, is a student's reflective drawing based on Mr. AM's story of immigration from Mexico. It indicates Mr. AM's unhappy life situation in Mexico (the right side of the "border" line), and his happiness when he crossed the border through the "open" gate. The smiley stick figure on the left of the line is the symbol of welcome that Mr. AM felt when he immigrated to the United States.

Figure 7. Student's reflective drawing of AM's story

Figure 8 below is a student's reflective drawing based on Mr. Alkary's story about Muslim. This drawing indicates that the student learned that Islam emphasizes peace ("Peace be upon you"). It also shows the student's learning about Ramadan reflected in the short conversation: "Why are you hungry so much"? "No I'm not!" What is more interesting in this drawing is the cross with the word *Islam* on it. It might be a symbol of peace between the Christianity and Islam.

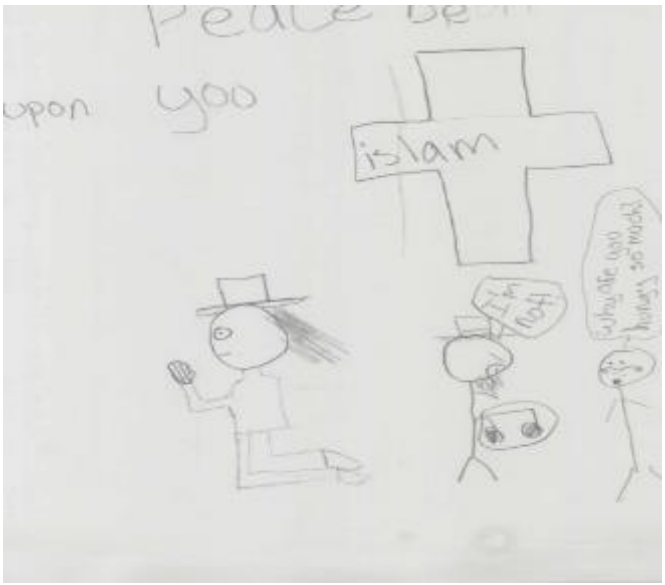

Figure 8. Student's Reflective Drawing on Mr. Alkary's Story

Figure 9 below is a student's reflective drawing based on Ms. Holm's story about how her Black ancestors were settled in Nicodemus. It indicates the student's learning about the historical town Nicodemus with happy people, one-room schoolhouse, and the popularity of baseball.

Figure 9. Student's Reflective Drawing on Ms. Holm's Story

Figure 10, below, illustrates that a student used the word "Different" as the beginning point (topic) of the mind map. The student listed the areas of differences such as religion, language, culture, art, food, music, and more. This drawing represents the student's knowledge about differences.

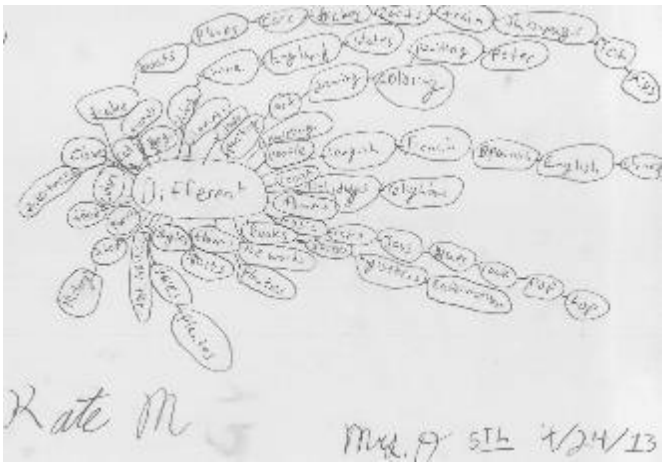

Figure 10. A student's mind map

Learning Outcomes Reflected in Short Writings

To find out more directly what students learned from the Storytelling/Mural Project, we asked the students to answer a series of questions in two to three sentences. The short writings tell us that students learned many different things from the project such as differences, history,

making art, ways to communicate, and collaboration. Some students learned that we are all different in terms of culture, religion, language, and race. They seemed to accept that people come from different places, and because we are different, everyone has a story to tell, and we all can get along. Some learned historical facts and personal information about the storytellers. Others learned that working together takes teamwork and collaboration is a way of making friends, having fun and getting the job done. It is obvious that students are learning to understand the nature of democratic citizenship such as communication, collaboration, accepting differences, and respecting each other (see Table 2).

Table 2

Learning Outcomes Reflected in Short Writings

Questions	Learning Outcomes
• What did I learn from the storytellers? • What did I learn about art and mural making? • What did I learn about from working together? • Will what you learned change how you act toward others in the future? How?	• *I learned that even though we have many differences, we can all get along. We have different cultures, personalities, and backgrounds. (Abby)* • *What I learned from the storytellers is that there were only a little bit of people in nicedemous (sic). I learned that AM worked really hard to be an artist. I learned that there aren't only Americans in the state. There are different people in the state. (Abdul)* • *Art takes time and can also tell stories of cultures or what's going on in the world. (AJ)* • *You need to take your time when you're drawing because if you mess up you'll have to start and then you get frustrated and want to quit. Never give up on what you believe in you'll always regret it. When it comes to your dreams it's all about you. (Jessica)* • *People need to learn to work together and communicate together (Tyreasha)* • *Now I know it more fun to work with other people than being alone all the time. (Declan)* • *Everyone wants different things in a painting and everyone might like different things in a painting. Everyone's ideas matter and came be made into a huge mural painting. (Mikayla)*

Learning Outcomes Reflected in Students' Stories

As mentioned earlier, three classroom teachers led writing sessions for students following the storytelling sessions. Students were given the following prompts: *Describe a time when you*

met someone you felt was very different than you. Who was that person? How did you act toward them? How did they act toward you? The stories revealed their thoughts about understanding someone who is different from them.

Raegan's Story. Raegan chose to talk about his cousin Zahn who had autism as someone different from him (see Figure 11). He confesses that he used to be "upset" at Zahn but now he wishes to spend more time with Zahn and know more about him. So, he hopes that some day, he *"can just sit down with him and talk to him without him ignoring being or not looking at me."* Raegan shows sympathetic understanding of Zahn as "the other." He feels *"sad"* for Zahn for having autism. Even more, he realizes that he still loves Zahn despite the fact that he used to be upset with Zahn for his behavior.

> The time someone was very different from me was when I met my cousin Zahn. He has autosome (autism) so he constently(constantly) did things over and over again. I acted towards him as he was just normal or didn't have autosome but it kinda got hard after awhile. He just kept doing the same thing and I was getting upset at him but I always had to keep in mind he's not the same as me. The way Zahn acts towards me is he just wants me to do everything he does. But the thing that makes me sad is Zahn's fifteen and he really doesn't talk much and he doesn't like people to touch him very much. He really just does everything by himself. I wish I would of spent more time with him growing up because he really doesn't really talk to me and I want him to because I really love him and I want to get to know him more because I really don't know much about him. So one day I hope I can just sit down with him and talk to him without him ignoring being or not looking at me. (sic)

Figure 11. Reagan's story

Abi's Story. Abi selected to talk about her neighbor Emma as "the other," someone different from her (see Figure 12). Emma is three years younger than Abi and she has divorced parents. Abi understands how "*lonely, lonely"* Emma would be with one parent, so Abi wants to act as Emma's "*big sister.*" Here, Abi is able to put herself in Emma's shoes. At first, she didn't think that she could be friends with Emma, but with her understanding of Emma's situation, Abi voluntarily becomes Emma's play date, and eventually they have become best friends. Abi describes in a dramatic way the exciting moment when Emma told her what she was waiting to hear for a long time, making us wonder what had happened "that night." She wrote, *"But then came the night I had been waiting for for a long long time."* What was Abi waiting for "*for a long, long time*"? She was waiting to hear that Emma would consider Abi her big

sister. When Emma finally said, "*Abi, sometimes you feel like a big sister to me,"* Abi was so thrilled that she would never forget the day. Abi shows her genuine excitement with compassion and love that goes beyond feeling sorry for Emma.

> My neighbor Emma is very different from me. She is only 7 years old. Because she's so little compared to me sometimes I think she's kinda kinda weird and babyish. But one day I heard that her parents had had a divorcement (divorce). I never really knew what a devorcement between your parents was like, until Emma's parents had one. Emma wasn't an only child, but her brother is in college and she barely gets to play with him. So now she would be very very lonely. When I heard about the divorcement. I knew that she would be lonely so I had to act like a big sister to her. Soon I didn't want to hide when she walked up to me. I was the one who asked if I could play with her. I started truly be a big sister to her. I taught her how to play some sports, and I helped her when I was needed. But I never thought that I would ask a second grader for a sleepover. I loved making arts and crafts with her. Getting gifts for each other on holidays. We would jump on my trampoline, and go to the park together. We would play in our clubhouse, and on my swing set.
>
> By now we were best friends. We would even have dinner together sometimes. Of course we would have our fights, but still we were true best friends forever. But then came the night I had been waiting for for a long long time. It was very late at night, but we were still trying to fit in a fifteen minute play date. I was trying to teach her how to rollerskate, and I showed her some of my best movies. Then her mom called her for bed. So we sat down on the bench and began to take our skates off. I told her that she was doing really good and that she was almost as good as I was, and you know what she said to me…Abi, sometimes you feel like a big sister to me. I had been waiting so long for her to say I was a big sister to her, that I promise that I will never ever forget that day (sic).

Figure 12. Abi's story

Mason's Story. Mason's story shows how the fifth graders can help each other through understanding and collaboration transcending their differences (see Figure 13). Mason said that he didn't talk to Isic when they first met because they liked different things. But eventually Mason helped Isic to be good at sports and Isic helped Mason to be good at multiplication in return. These reciprocal ability-exchanges are a sign of becoming good citizens who can help and collaborate with others, drawing upon each individual's strengths.

> One time when I met someone new it was like I like sports he likes school and art and for about the first few weeks we never talked to each other at all. But then one day he tried to do sports but he wasn't very good so we taught him how and he started to get very good. Then he asked if I wanted to learn stuff like math and I said sure. So he told me how to do multiplication and I picked it up very fast. His name was Isic. We were friends with each other. (sic)

Figure 13. Mason's story

Unexpected Outcomes

Every curriculum has unintentional outcomes that a teacher does not foresee. One of the unexpected outcomes came from some students who did not previously voice themselves in class. These students not only expressed their thoughts actively in drawing and writing, but also they displayed a sign of narrative imagination that embraces empathy and compassion.

The first example involves a typically disengaged student named Brandon. He was a student who often had behavioral problems and academic struggles due to his Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). His misbehavior had even led to social troubles with his peers. Art teacher Anna had often experienced Brandon's erratic and disruptive behavior in her art class.

Surprisingly, however, Brandon was very engaged during the discussion of Diego Rivera's work and his sketches reflected Rivera's influence (see Figure 14). Anna asked Brandon to reflect verbally about his drawing because his writing skill was not good enough to describe his drawing. He explained the meaning of the robot figure that he called the "Keeper of the Universe." He said how he was drawn to the mechanical elements in Rivera's *Man the Controller of the Universe*. In one hand, the robot held the world and the arm was labeled "The war." In the other hand, held the words "Take chances" and "Hope." The arm was called "The Treaty." The body of the robot included a clock and the words "Time" and "Peace." One leg was rooted to the ground and the other held the word "Imagination." Brandon explained his symbolism that the Keeper watched over the world and helped it. In his very abstract visual way, Brandon demonstrated his potential to become a world citizen who was concerned about the peace in the universe.

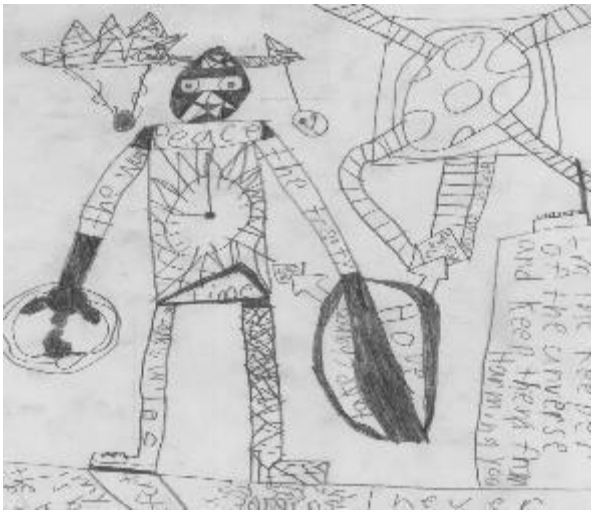

Figure 14. Brandon's drawing

The muralist AM was very impressed with Brandon's drawing when he began reviewing the students' images for the mural. In his final design, Brandon's Keeper became a prominent image (as shown in Figure 5 above). When the students first saw the sketched out plan on the mural board they immediately recognized Brandon's drawing. Suddenly, Brandon went from being the outsider to being the star of the mural.

More instances of the students' pride and empowerment were observed especially among students of color. For example, several Latino/a students shared their personal stories of immigration with either Anna or their classmates for the first time after AM's story. In one instance, a student told Anna that her father had recently been deported and separated from the rest of her family. This information had not been previously shared with the school faculty. In another, an extremely shy Saudi Arabian girl, Sarah, who previously did not enjoy drawing, drew a picture celebrating her religion after Mr. Alkary spoke (see Figure 15). She wrote in her drawing, "I'm Muslim [sic]," and "I feel Good wen I pray" [sic].

Figure 15. Sarah's drawing

Students' Desire to Change

What is also interesting is some students' reactions to one of our questions asked in class, *Will what you learned change how you act toward others in the future? If so, how?* With this question, we wanted to see if students would be willing to change their attitudes and actions toward others as a result of learning. That is, would this sign of narrative imagination be transferred to their future actions? Would it become part of their personal growth helping them become world citizens?

Interestingly, while two-thirds of the students responded that they would change how they act toward others, one-third responded that they would not (see Figure 16). Students who responded that they would change how they act toward others stated that they learned to respect others and their differences. They also stated that they would pay attention to what others have to say and be nicer and kinder toward others. However, interestingly, one-third of the participants said that they would not change in the way they act toward others (see Table 3).

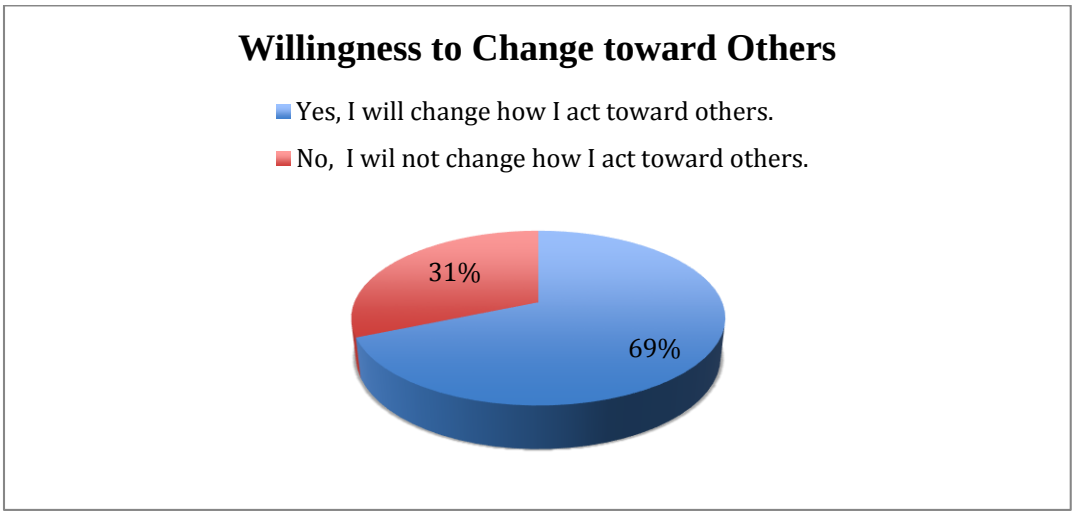

Figure 16. Willingness to change

Table 3

Reasons for (Un)Willingness to Change Toward Others

YES CHANGE	NO CHANGE
• Yes, I will. You have to learn to be patient with other and that can change the way you act towards your action. You can also act nicer toward other people because of what you learned. (Oliva) • Yes. Because I used to think that we are all the same. (Donovan) • The things I learned will change the way we work with others because I learned to respect. (Kyle) • I think I will change the ways I act toward others I will want to hear their stories, and you need to appreciate how they act and how you act around them. (Jessica)	• No, because I treat people nicely and I like who I am. People might want to change themselves, but I do not want to change how I act or how I might say because I control and get punished for my actions. (Mikayla) • No, because I already know this. Because of slavery. (Kailey) • No, because I am not a mean person. (No name) • No, because I treat others the way I want to be treated. I also treat people like they are human and not different. (Hailey) • No because I already treat all people evenly. (Austin) • I would not change because I love the way I act funny, happy, and good I love to be myself. (Katie) • No because I think the way I act towards others isn't gonna change

	because I'm never not kind to anyone. (Tyreasha) • The things I learned won't change how I act toward other people because I already am pretty nice. (Talia)

Students who do not want to change their attitude toward others reported that they believed they were already doing a good job in how they act toward others. It is encouraging to discover that they are confident in how they treat people. While we do not want to undermine the students' perceptions of who they are, some questions arose, however: How do we educators deal with students who think they are already "nice" enough, hence no need to change? How do we help them understand the meaning of "change" and "personal growth"? How do we help them examine themselves critically and think more deeply about bettering themselves to understand "the other"?

Discussions: Lessons Learned

In this article, we set out to challenge the current emphasis on knowledge and skills for college and career, mainly influenced by the long-standing standards-based education. Educators do welcome high standards (Lytle, 2006), but the problem is that raising standards has grown to mean standardizing curriculum, as the two terms, standards and standardization, have become synonymous (McNeil, 2009; Sleeter & Stillman, 2009). As standards tend to drive instruction (Porter et al., 2011a), the topics of standards-based instruction, assessment, and accountability are at the forefront of conversations about education, placing much pressure on both teachers and teacher educators (Knight et al., 2013). Our Storytelling/Mural Project is a collaborative grounded practice between a teacher educator and a teacher to address this concern and rethink the meaning of education. Although it is a one-time "experimentation," done in a short period of time, there are several lessons learned from the project.

First, we learned that most fifth graders are capable of narrative imagination and an understanding of "the other." None of the students' writings or drawings indicates prejudices or hateful remarks. Rather, they show some degree of open-mindedness, understanding, and acceptance of differences. They have these inner capacities and interests, what Dewey (1915/2001) calls, "natural resources, the uninvested capital, upon the exercise of which depends the active growth of the child" (p. 31). According to Dewey, such inner capacities and natural resources are the basis of active growth of the child, and urges educators to get hold of them and develop them to something better. Our Storytelling/Mural Painting Project can be a way to get hold of such existing inner capacities of our young students.

Second, we learned how powerful the art of storytelling can be in promoting narrative imagination. Nussbaum (1998) states that children deprived of stories are also deprived of certain ways of viewing other people who are different. Through storytelling, our fifth graders experienced vicariously what it would be like to cross the border to come to the United States in pursuit of a better life and what sufferings one had to go through to be able to be a legal citizen. Students also experienced vicariously what it would be like to be freed from slavery and get settled in a small town to start a new life. They also learned vicariously what it would be like to practice Islam in the Christianity-centered community. Through these vicarious experiences, students had to wonder what it would be like to be in the shoes of the storytellers. Through this wondering, students demonstrated the ability or willingness to accept the differences and respect and imagine human dignity in their drawings and writings.

Finally, we learned that the arts are the hinge that connects other subject matters, further contributing to fostering narrative imagination. The integration of the different subject matters that art teacher Anna made in collaboration with three classroom teachers, a local muralist, and three storytellers, is incredibly valuable. Benefits of the arts on education have been well documented (see, for example, Bowen, Greene, & Kisida, 2014). It is obvious that our fifth graders have harvested benefits from the arts-integrated curriculum in spite of the short period of time of the curriculum implementation. Yet, recent research shows that children's exposure to the arts has decreased primarily by cuts in school-based arts programs, especially in schools with large concentrations of disadvantaged students in terms of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and language (Bowen et al., 2014; Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013; Government Accounting Office, 2009; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). We argue that the arts should be placed at the center even in the age of standards and be used as the hinge to connect other subject matters such as reading, writing, math, and science.

Conclusion: A Model for Rethinking Education

As we mentioned earlier, the Storytelling/Mural Painting Project was a one-time "experimentation" done with only fifth graders. Although we see a hint of benefits of this curriculum in fostering narrative imagination in elementary students, we realize that this is not enough. We will need to "continue" to implement this kind of integrated curriculum in order to meet Dewey's (1938) *principle of continuity of experience*. We should *continue* to provide students with such a curriculum in order to contribute to their formation of attitudes toward "the other" with narrative imagination. In this continuation, students' moral, intellectual, and democratic understanding of "the other" along with their wisdom and good judgment will grow and develop to the direction that will promote further growth.

Keeping this limitation in mind, we conclude our article by suggesting a model for rethinking education in the age of standards, based on the lessons we learned (see Figure 17).

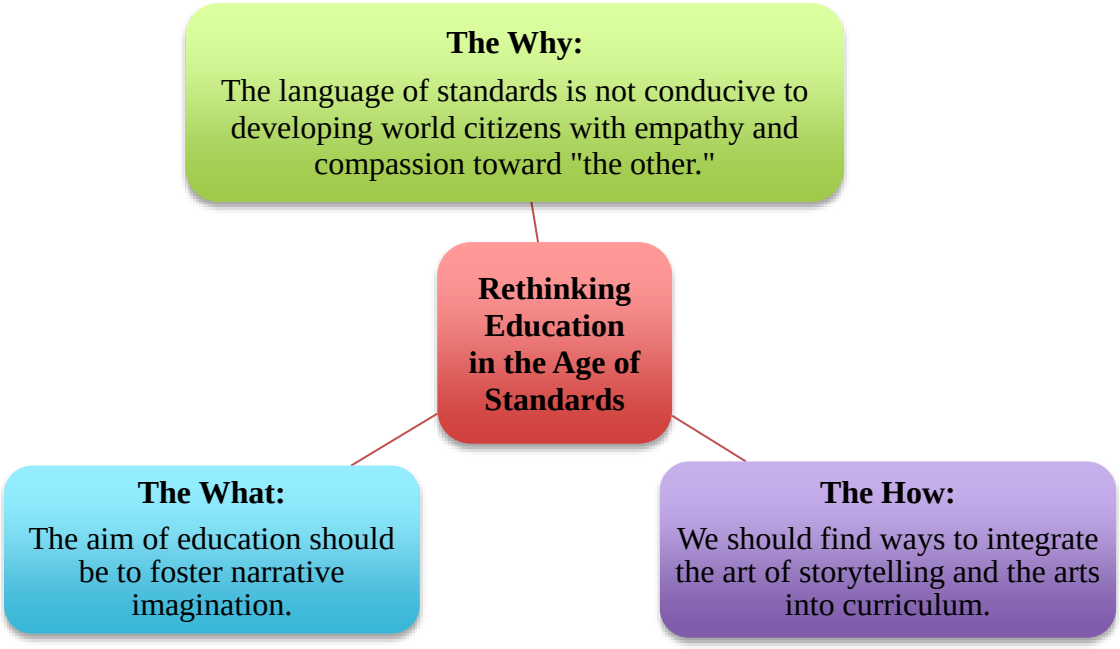

Figure 17. A model for rethinking education in the age of standards

The why

Why do we need to rethink education in the age of standards? The language of standards is confined to uniformity and standardization, and is not conducive to developing world citizens who possess wisdom and good judgment. Further, educators are not just the "accepted guardians and transmitters of established doctrines" (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 149) of the standards movement. Rather than fitting into the Procrustean bed of traditional beliefs about standards and standardization, we need to rethink the aim of education.

The what

What, then, should be the aim of education? The aim of education should be to foster narrative imagination and to develop world citizens who are capable of compassion and imagination. Imagination is "the only gateway" (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 272) through which meanings of the experience of "the other" can be understood, and such imagination requires compassion.

The how

How do we achieve the aim? We should find ways to incorporate the art of storytelling and the arts into the school curriculum. The arts provide students with aesthetic experience, which Dewey defines as "a mode of knowledge" (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 290) where general knowledge is transformed and becomes "something more than knowledge because it is merged with non-intellectual elements to form an experience worth while as an experience" (p. 290). Therefore, instead of reducing or eliminating the arts from school curriculum, we should *increase* instructional time for the arts and find pedagogical ways to integrate them into other subject matters.

Final thoughts

It is our hope that this model will help us rethink and reexamine our practice in the age of standards. Our intention is not to undermine the work of educators who are in favor of the standards-based movement or standards-based instruction. Rather, we simply want to remind all of our fellow educators of what Dewey (1938) said about *education*:

> What we want and need is education pure and simple, and we shall make surer and faster progress when we devote ourselves to finding out just what education is and what conditions have to be satisfied in order that education may be a reality and not a name or a slogan (p. 91)

All of us are in the same boat to make education a reality, not a name or a slogan.

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Jeong-Hee Kim is Professor of Curriculum Studies in the College of Education at Texas Tech University. Her research interests center on various epistemological underpinnings of curriculum studies, particularly focusing on phenomenological and hermeneutical ways of understanding of the stories of students and teachers around the notion of *Bildung*, a human way of developing or cultivating one's capacity. She received two Outstanding Narrative Article Awards from AERA, Narrative Research Special Interest Group. She recently published an acclaimed book, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (2015) with SAGE publications.

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Appendix A

Understanding "the Other" through Art
Unit Plan

Unit Goals and Objectives:

A) Students will gain empathy and understanding of those different than themselves through creative expression and collaboration in order to build a strong school and neighborhood community.
B) Students will feel personally empowered by understanding their actions can help to make their school and communities more positive and just places for everyone.
C) Students will work collaboratively on a permanent mural for the school.
D) Students will integrate their art learning with general education goals in writing, math, and social studies.

Student Prior Knowledge:

Students have been following an art curriculum that explores ideas about why artists create, the contexts in which they create, and the messages about the human experience that artists hope to express. They have beginner level technical experience with drawing, painting, and composition.

Art Lesson One: Painting Poetry

Objectives:

Students will learn how to express abstract ideas using symbolism and techniques in painting.

Description:
The teacher will present a collaboration of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Maya Angelo, entitled, *Life Doesn't Frighten Me.* This can be done through reading the book to the class or showing the animated version on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkfKcIvpxGM).

The class will then discuss the poem and the feelings it elicits. What does Basquiat do to elicit those feelings through his paintings? Students notice his color choices, strokes, and symbolic imagery.

Students will then be given several poems to read in their groups that the teacher has complied previously. Poems should be appropriate reading level for 5th grade and utilize easy to understand symbolism. Students take turn reading the poems aloud in their small groups.

The teacher can then demonstrate and model how one might choose certain colors or symbols to paint the *feeling* of a poem. The teacher can then have students practice some painting techniques for expressing different emotions.

Finally students are asked to choose one of the poems they read in their group and individually create a painting that portrays the feeling of the poem. Students are encouraged to develop their own imagery and not to illustrate the poem (This will be a challenge for most).

Writing Prompt One:

Objective: Students demonstrate proficient writing conventions for 5th grade and reflect on their experiences with "the other." Researcher establishing how empathic are students prior to unit.

Description:
With their normal classroom or writing teachers, students will follow state standards for writing and answer the following prompt: Describe a time when you met someone you felt was very different than you. Who was that person? How did you act toward them? How did they act toward you?

Story Telling Sessions:

Objective: Students will build understanding and empathy for others different then themselves by listening to shared stories. Students will meet standards for writing conventions and developing written ideas.

Description:
Invite three diverse members of the community to share their "story" or lived experiences with the students. The situation should be set so the speaker can talk casually with the students as if telling a story and allowing time for students to ask questions at the end. Stories should take no more than 30 minutes and no more than one speaker per day.

After each storytelling session students will be allowed to "debrief" with their classroom teachers. This is an opportunity to for students to ask questions they may have been too shy to ask the storyteller and have the opportunity to reflect with the guidance of the classroom teacher. Teachers may find it helpful to have students organize their thoughts with a worksheet. The worksheet can have three columns: The storyteller said:, This reminds me of:, and I could symbolize this idea:. The final column could be a written response or sketched.

Story Telling Art Sessions:

Objective: Students will meet standards for art in developing visual imagery to express ideas and demonstrate empathy and understanding of others through artistic techniques. Students will make preliminary drawings to help develop ideas for a school mural.

Description:
On the same day as the storyteller and classroom debriefing, students will also have an opportunity to meet with their art teacher. The art teacher will review with the class some ideas they discussed with their classroom teacher and the storyteller. The art teacher can help the students formulate the "big ideas" or main themes/emotions of the story. Students will brainstorm together some the ways they thought to symbolize their ideas. It may be helpful for the students to have their writing worksheet to reference.

Students will then be asked to create a drawing reflecting their experience of the story. This type of abstract thought will be difficult for students. The art teacher can help students understand the difference between a reflection and an illustration. If students are really struggling with what to draw, the teacher may encourage them to start with by illustrating one aspect of the story and then finding ways to show the emotion of the situation.

Students know that these sketches may be used in the final design of the class mural.

Muralist meeting:

Objective: Students will identify overarching themes of all the storytellers and develop imagery to express abstract concepts for a school mural. Students will learn about famous muralists and social contexts of their murals.

Description:
All the classes will gather for a meeting with the muralist. The muralist will help the students find "big ideas" or themes common among all the storytellers. The muralist may choose to share work from several famous muralists and help students analyze the symbolism. (We choose to show the work of Diego Rivera because the social themes related well to our storytellers and we wanted to encourage the students to portray the "everyday life and people" of our community and school. We also shared a regional muralist, John Steuart Curry, because of the students' familiarity with his themes and symbols.)

The students will then generate a list of overarching themes with the muralist's help. The muralist will ask the students to make a mind map with one of the themes in the center. Students should write down every thought that they associated with the theme.

After the students create their mind map they will use it to create one final composition. The muralist will then use these sketches along with their preliminary reflective sketches to create a three panel mural. He will directly transfer their imagery onto the mural so it is important for the students to do their best work.

Painting the mural:

Objective: Students practice cooperative learning skills while painting a large-scale mural together. Students demonstrate proficiency in technical painting skills and proper use of materials.

Description:
Students will meet in groups with the muralist to begin painting the mural. The muralist has prepared the panels and sketched out the composition ahead of time. The muralist will demonstrate the techniques for painting and review any procedural expectations. The muralist will demonstrate what to do when one student's painting area begins touch another student's. Painting a mural cooperatively is different than painting by yourself.

Final Writing Prompt:

Objective: Students reflect on their experience allowing teachers to understand level of impact the unit had on overall objectives while demonstrating proficiency in writing conventions**.**

Description:
Students are given several prompts as a final reflection and evaluation of their experience. The prompts were:
What did I learn from the storytellers?
What did I learn about art and murals?
What did I learn about working together?
How will this experience change how you act toward others?

Culminating Experience: Mural Dedication:

When the mural is complete students' work and community members' contributions will be acknowledged at a public mural dedication ceremony. The dedication is an opportunity for teachers and muralists to share the impact of the curriculum and honor the storytellers and any supporters of the project. Students can read some of their written responses.

Final Evaluation:

The unit will be evaluated by collecting qualitative data throughout the entire process. Students' writing and drawings will be evaluated on both technical proficiency and quality of ideas in accordance to state standards. The art teacher will be taking detailed field notes on students' participation and interactions with the speakers, artist, and peers. If possible, student interviews will be conducted. Through analysis of the student artifacts and field notes the art teacher will evaluate if the overall objectives of the project have been met.

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