

How the Intersection of Two Planes of Experience Equaled One Beautiful Art Gallery

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ABSTRACT

In this article, Jennifer, a PDS Liaison from the University of South Carolina, and Ashley, an art teacher at a PDS school, discuss a recent project that highlighted the exceptional instruction occurring at Pontiac Elementary School.

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS (2nd Edition) ADDRESSED IN THIS ARTICLE:

1. A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.
3. A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.
4. A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.

Jennifer D. Morrison (JDM): The display cases and bulletin boards that inhabited the north wing of the University of South Carolina's College of Education building had been empty and run-down long before I ever arrived. I watched them continue to be neglected for four years. Then, last year in my first year as a PDS Liaison, I decided the space could be put to better use by offering the PDS school that I worked with an opportunity to showcase student work and highlight the outstanding teaching and instruction I was witnessing occur on a daily basis. Excited by this prospect, I approached Ashley Quam, the exceptional art teacher at Pontiac Elementary School in Elgin, SC, about how we could create a gallery to feature her students' work. She was enthusiastic, and together we began building a vision for the space.

Ashley Quam (AQ): Jennifer Morrison, the PDS Liaison for the University of South Carolina Department of Instruction and Teacher Education, reached out to me early last school year about a possible collaboration between the university and Pontiac Elementary School students. She expressed a desire to include more authentic student work within the College of Education building to inspire future educators and create a greater sense of connection between the university and the surrounding community. She shared that there was an empty wall space and display cases within the building that had been neglected for too long and could serve as a perfect spot to highlight student artwork. I jumped at the chance! My K-5 students did not have many opportunities to showcase their talents outside of the school building itself, and the prestige of their saying, "My art is on display at UofSC" was too good to pass up!

This opportunity also spoke to me because I am a strong proponent for choice in education. I embrace the 'Teaching for Artistic Behavior' (TAB) philosophy and love to expose students to a variety of mediums and techniques. The TAB philosophy is a contemporary approach to art education where the student is viewed as the artist and the classroom is treated as their studio. The teacher is a facilitator of discovery and offers demonstrations that teach technique, while the student is the main determiner of subject matter. Sharing students' work and their processes for creating it aligned with my core beliefs about students and art education.

JDM: To begin, I had to access the locked display cases. It had been so long since they were used, no one knew where keys were; a locksmith had to be called to change the locks and make the cases usable. Once inside, I ripped out layers of crumbling paper and tediously pulled out what felt like a thousand staples from years of accumulated – and long-forgotten – displays. Once I had cleared the spaces, I repaired and painted the drywall in the display case and the cork on the bulletin boards. I installed a shelving unit with adjustable brackets and mounted puck lights on the ceiling over the bulletin boards and within the display case that could be operated with a remote control.

Ms. Quam spent the better part of a day arranging her students' 2D and 3D student artwork within the various spaces. She also included artist statements written by the featured students, books that represented her and the school's teaching philosophies, and a digital picture frame that scrolled through photographs of students engaged in art instruction and production (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1

University of South Carolina College of Education display case filled with Pontiac ES student art



Figure 2

University of South Carolina College of Education bulletin board of Pontiac ES student art



AQ: I made sure to share with administration and parents that it was an honor to have their work on display at the university. Students were exceptionally proud to have their *first* show hosted by the university (which I am confident that this certainly will not be their last).

JDM: We celebrated the inaugural PDS Partners Art Gallery display by inviting students, their families, school and district administrators, university representatives, and local media to an unveiling ceremony. Students and families were given the opportunity to pose for photographs and talk with local media about the artwork.

AQ: Dr. Morrison and I decided to hold an opening reception with refreshments and fanfare and to invite students, their families, administration, and university representatives to come in their finest regalia to celebrate. Students arrived with entire families in tow and spoke to adults from the university about their artwork and their choices; what they've learned about themselves through developing the skills and confidence to express themselves; and what they want to study when they attend college one day. These conversations were exceptionally important because many of these students will be the first people in their families to seek higher education and, as a *Leader in Me* elementary school that teaches AVID strategies, we want to promote conversations about college and provide opportunities for students to familiarize themselves with universities so they will feel a comfortable sense of belonging in such spaces. Our students were invited to “dream” beyond their current worlds. Through this event, students felt like real artists sharing their work in a gallery show, and UofSC connected with the community in a real, meaningful, and memorable way (see Figures 3, 4, 5).

Figure 3

Pontiac ES student at media event sharing artwork



Figure 4

Pontiac ES student at media event sharing artwork



Figure 5

Ms. Quam with Pontiac ES student at UofSC College of Education



JDM: I am excited for the future of this project. While Pontiac Elementary School was the first to showcase student work, we have created a sustainable process by which other PDS Liaisons are able to sign up for time to share their schools' achievements. At this point, the baton has been passed to Blythewood High School, and we look forward to many years of highlighting the brilliant teachers and children we are fortunate to work with through our extensive PDS network.

The link to the announcement can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/UofSCart>

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Ashley Quam is an art teacher at Pontiac Elementary School and has spent the last thirteen years teaching visual art to elementary, middle, and high school students as well as Choice Practices to undergraduates at The Art of Education University.