The Art of Inclusion

Jan MacLean
Department of Education
Simon Fraser University

For the purpose of this paper I will be focusing on secondary students with cognitive or intellectual disabilities. Adolescents with cognitive challenges are students who have an I.Q. of less than 70% as a result of Down Syndrome, brain damage or other organic causes. I have chosen to focus on this group for a number of reasons. The foremost reason is that I have worked extensively on a range of art activities and projects in both segregated and integrated settings that involve children and youth who are labeled as being mildly mentally handicapped. I have chosen to focus primarily on adolescents because, through my practice, I have noticed that there are significant differences between elementary and secondary school settings. Generally, I have observed that in elementary school settings, students with diverse needs and abilities are more easily integrated into the classroom community, whereas in secondary settings these students are often given the more marginalized status of 'visitor' to the mainstream classroom.

In order to successfully include and educate these students I feel we need to ask the question "what should the aims of education be in relation to these students?" The B.C. Ministry of Education states:

The goal of the B.C. School System is to support the

> intellectual development of all students including those with special needs. Enabling all students to achieve the goals of human, social and cultural development is a responsibility shared by schools, families and communities. (Retrieved on March 5, 2007 from www.bced.gov. bc.ca/specialed/).

If we agree that the aim of education should be to give students the appropriate tools for perceiving and making sense of the world, as well as the ability to participate fully in our culture, we have to question what curriculum these students are involved in. Curriculum matters because, as Elliot Eisner points in *Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002), "parents send their children to school to have their minds made"(p. 9).

The curriculum in our schools reflects what we value as a culture. It is not surprising then that academic subjects are placed firmly in the center as 'core' subjects and the arts are relegated to the status of 'electives'. The arts are seen primarily as a kind of relief from the rigorous demands of academic subjects. Hence, the majority of students' time in schools is spent on academic subjects such as science and math. In order for students with intellectual disabilities to engage in these subject matters with their age related peers, the material almost always needs to be modified, adapted or otherwise altered. The abilities of these students are looked at through the perspective of what they are not able to do. In my opinion, too much of these students' time, is spent struggling with an approach to learning that is not particularly suited to them.

It is my conviction that many students with intellectual disabilities have the potential of becoming fully realized human beings, capable of making worthwhile contributions to our society. However, I think it is unlikely that this objective will be met given the way that these students are presently being educated. Instead of these students being placed on the margins of the learning experience, their needs, abilities, and strengths should be placed front and center. To my mind we should be thinking of promoting not only numerical and written literacy, but also literacy in the arts.

It is my belief that participation in the arts can promote a stronger sense of agency and a fuller sense of self in these students. In this regard, the following two ideas are key points: the first idea is that the arts can contribute to the development of cognitive abilities, and the second is that education in the arts provides students with the cognitive tools needed to make sense and meaning out of the world. For, by becoming human beings capable of expressing their own unique voice, individuals with intellectual disabilities will be better able to engage in our culture, thereby inhabiting a more equitable place in our society.

Why the Arts?

I believe the arts are ideally suited to meet the varied needs and abilities of students for a number of reasons. One of the key reasons is that diversity and variability are celebrated in the arts (Eisner, 2002). This is particularly relevant for students who are having difficulty performing in academic subjects where they are expected to acquire knowledge in a more set manner. In the arts, individual perspective is important and multiple interpretations are encouraged. There can be more than one answer to a question and more than one solution to a problem. Variability of outcome is not only expected, it is encouraged. A student can't be told that what they are seeing in their imagination and expressing through art is 'wrong'. The fact that there can be any number of 'right' answers to a question posed through the arts can be very freeing and empowering for students who struggle academically. By reinforcing that the student's ideas have validity, students are far more likely to want to engage in cognitive processes like problem solving. As well, there is less likelihood of students 'shutting down' because they feel it is hopeless to try. This creates a much more equitable learning situation, as each student feels capable of making a worthwhile contribution to the activity.

One of the most positive aspects of the arts is that they offer a wide range of entry points, which in turn makes this domain more accessible for individuals with diverse needs and abilities. Through participation in art activities, students can be engaged on a number of levels; which include the cognitive, sensory, physical and emotional aspects of the individu-

al. Once engaged, the individual can begin to shift between levels of understanding. These levels of understanding can eventually form a basis of knowledge and experience that can be expanded upon. The arts can also provide tools for changing perceptions. Maxine Greene states in *Releasing the Imagination,* "participatory encounters with particular works may demand as much cognitive rigor and analysis as they do affective response" (1995, p. 27).

As well, participation in art activities promotes "tolerance for ambiguity" (Rogers, 1976, p. 300). This is particularly relevant for individuals who are cognitively challenged because these students often exhibit less than flexible thinking in the context of their everyday environment. This rigidity may be explained by a psychological need to order the world using a structure that is easy to follow and understand. The ability to perceive many possibilities without having to decide which one is right promotes flexibility of thinking that can be transferred into areas outside of art activities. The ability to accept tension and even enjoy the uncertainty of the moment encourages these students to take risks both with their thinking and their behavior. A decrease in fear and anxiety contributes to a sense of well-being that eventually translates into increased self-confidence. Increased self-assurance is significant in relation to individuals with cognitive challenges, as often they have decreased academic and social standing. As well, the experience of tolerating a certain amount of uncertainty is advantageous because these students are often less comfortable with changes in routine. In addition, the ability to tolerate ambiguity may increase the individual's capacity to adapt to new and stressful environments as well as situations outside of the realm of art.

 Another important reason I believe the arts are so well suited to this task is that art activities offer an ideal opportunity for participants to play spontaneously with disparate ideas and concepts. Koestler describes this process as the "bisociation of unconnected matrices" (Bailin, 1994, p. 65) which is essentially "a coming together of two realms of thought that had previously been considered incompatible" (p. 65). The arts offer many opportunities to make these connections. In

visual art, you can juxtapose complimentary colors, contrast textures and so on, to create a composition with unity and balance. In drama, you have games like 'anything but', where students use an everyday object like a drum, as anything but what it was intended for. Students might use the drum as a bowl, a mirror or a hat. In dance, you can pair unlikely verbs with adverbs such as 'tip toeing loudly', 'skipping aggressively' and 'running slowly' and explore these combinations through movement. These are just a few examples, but there are many more.

In the arts you have the opportunity to take an 'interdisciplinary approach' to learning, by combining elements of music, dance, drama and visual arts in order to explore a concept in multiple ways. In addition, art activities offer students the opportunity to become absorbed in the flow of the creative process, which increases the ability to concentrate. This is because, as Eisner states, "in the arts a special level of focused attention is realized, a form of attention that is seldom called upon in most of the situations we experience" (p. 23). Eisner also makes the point that besides offering a means to increase concentration, the arts help to develop sequential thinking and promote intelligent planning.

Constructing Meaning Through the Arts

In my view, the most compelling reason the arts are so well suited to meet the diverse needs of students is that the arts offer students with intellectual disabilities a means to form their own unique voice in order to tell their distinct stories. This point is key, for as both Eisner and Taylor tell us, it is primarily through narrative that we are able to understand and make sense of our lives. It is our nature as humans to want to make sense of the world and to express what we have come to believe. Expression is an important part of articulating our experience because, often, we do not know what it is we are trying to say until we engage in the process of articulating it (Taylor, 1992). Our feeling only becomes clear as we engage in the process of expressing it. Eisner points out that one of the most important roles teachers play is to help students articulate their responses and feelings about what they have experienced. However, 'this something to say' may not be able

to be said in literal language.

Charles Taylor tells us that the arts offer us subtler languages. In the *Malaise of Modernity*, Taylor states "The poem is finding the words for us. In this 'subtler language' – the term is borrowed from Shelley- something is defined and created as well as manifested" (1992, p. 85). Taylor offers the example of a poem finding the words for us, but it could just as well be a painting, a song or a dance, or any other form of artistic expression. What is important is that through the process of creating art, we are able to express something previously hidden from us and make it visible.

The arts offer a powerful means for students to come to know themselves and to engage in the process of re-creating themselves. Few academic subjects afford this opportunity. As well, art offers the means to imagine new ways of uncovering who we think we are. The ability to re-imagine ourselves is particularly relevant in relationship to students with intellectual disabilities because, even though students with cognitive disabilities may have limited expressive and receptive language abilities, I would argue that their imagination is not impaired. Therefore, finding ways to articulate and express the content of their imagination is critical to these students being able to tell their own stories.

Through my work in this area, it has become evident to me that imagination is useful not only in terms of art making, but also in terms of how one imagines oneself in society. I feel that it is essential that we remain open to what Maxine Greene describes as the "untapped possibility of previously unarticulated voices and sensibilities" (p. 43). Greene proposes that imagination can nurture a sense of worthiness and agency. She states that "at the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed" (p. 123). Greene speaks of participation in the arts as a way of overcoming passivity and is in fact a way to attend actively. The idea of 'attending actively' is particularly relevant to individuals with

low I.Q.s, as this group is generally viewed as being passive. Greene states:

> The stigma of "disabled" or "low IQ" too frequently forces young people to be seen as recipients of treatment, sometimes from the most benevolent motives on the part of those hoping to "help". Far too seldom are such young people looked upon as being capable of imagining, of choosing, and of acting from their own vantage points on perceived possibility. The supporting structures that exist are not used to sustain a sense of agency among those they shelter. (p. 41)

I agree with Greene that imagination can act as a crucial opening for individual voice and perspective to occur. For through the imaginative process of art making, students are more able to construct their own meaning and form their own unique voice in order to communicate these meanings. The beauty of the arts is that they can provide the means to express and articulate what cannot be said literally with words. Active participation is vital in telling your own story, as is developing an alternate form of language when verbal language fails us. This is why it is so important that we offer students who are struggling with written and verbal language alternative modes of expression.

Thinking in the Arts

In our culture we tend to equate intelligence with the ability to reason well and express ourselves in a factual manner. This definition of intelligence can be traced back to the turn of the century when Alfred Binet invented the Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) test as a way of assessing people's mental abilities. This scientific approach to measuring the mind's potential has resulted in a rather one-dimensional view of intelligence (Gardner, 1993). It has also resulted in a curriculum that heavily favors subjects that follow set rules and offer measurable results.

In general, students with intellectual disabilities have restricted expressive and receptive language abilities. This in turn affects their ability to process and express written and verbal

information. These factors are significant, because it is primarily through the use of language that we are able to participate in our culture. As well, because we assess intelligence on the basis of doing well linguistically and logically, we tend to assume that individuals who are weak in these areas are destined to perform poorly overall. This is especially true for students with developmental deficiencies since it is assumed that they have a generalized disability, and that their thinking is impaired in all areas. From my point of view, this does not mean that such students are incapable of intellectual development; it simply means that it is unlikely that this development will follow the typical patterns of learning predicted by models of intelligence based on linguistic and logical skills.

In his book *Multiple Intelligences* (1993) Gardner offers the view that the mind is multifaceted and that 'linguistic and logical' skills are just one form of intelligence within a cluster of several different intelligences. Gardner's theory proposes a number of intelligences that include linguistic, logical, mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences.

Gardner urges us to adopt a different view on how to educate the mind. He makes the case that individuals have very different minds from each other and therefore schools should be places where students can develop diverse cognitive styles and strengths. I agree with Gardner that the purpose of schools should be to ensure that each student receive an education that maximizes his or her potential. Therefore, I would argue that it makes little sense for students with logical and linguistic intellectual difficulties to spend such a large amount of their time on subjects focused solely on these two skills.

Gardner points out that the realm of scientific thought and logic are but one of the symbol-making systems that we use to frame and make meaning of the world. Like Gardner, Eisner argues that the arts are based on their own unique symbol systems. Eisner makes the case that artistic activity is a form of inquiry that depends on qualitative forms of intelligence. Learning to paint, to draw, to compose music, or to dance requires learning to think by acquiring and applying these other

symbol systems. I agree with this point of view and I would argue that the arts could offer students who struggle with learning logic and linguistics an alternate form of language. Language is crucial, because as Taylor points out "we cannot be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language" (1989, p. 35).

Gardner makes the case that artistic cognition is on par with scientific cognition and stresses that we need to acknowledge forms of thought other than those held by proponents of the sciences. Gardner is not alone in his thinking. In *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953), Suzanne Langer argues that there is meaning in art just as there is in science. Langer proposes that we possess a basic human need to symbolize, invent and invest meaning in our world. Langer goes on to say that it is the property of the human mind to search for and to find meaning everywhere and to create new meanings from experience. She tells us that as humans we need to engage in the process of symbolic activity in order to make sense of our world.

Cassirer is in agreement with Langer. Cassirer makes the case that symbolic forms are not a form independent from reality; symbolic forms create our reality. He asserts, "language *constitutes* rather than *reflects* reality" (1975, p. 43). According to Cassirer, meanings arise from within us, and we assign these meanings on to people, objects and experiences in our life. Symbols are not separate from thought; they are the functioning of thought itself. This point is critical because it means that art making could provide these students with inner language along with outward modes of expression.

With so many thinkers eloquently arguing this point of view, why is 'thinking in the arts' generally not seen as being on par with 'thinking in science'? It might be because we live in a culture that tends to see scientific thought as inherently superior to other forms of symbolic expression and therefore we tend to see thinking in the arts as a 'talent' rather than an 'intelligence' (Eisner, 2002). I would add that it is also because as a culture we see science as being of instrumental value and the arts are seen as being of intrinsic value. In addition, re-

search in science is generally of a quantifiable nature while art research is usually qualitative. As a culture we tend to value what we can see and measure.

The argument that 'thinking in the arts' is of equal value with 'thinking in science' holds substantial implications for students with intellectual disabilities. This is because there exists a strong possibility that students who struggle with linguistic and logical tasks may not necessarily struggle with artistic ones. A few studies have shown that skills in the arts can exist independently of verbal and written skills. Claire Golomb (2002) proposes in her book, *Child Art in Context, A Cultural Comparative Perspective*, that "linguistic skills and art making skills may be independent of one another" (p. 137). Golomb carried out a study that examined drawing and copying skills of nine children with autism, eight with mental handicaps and matched them on five drawing and copying tasks with an equal number of non-disabled children according to mental age. The tasks were administered over eight consecutive sessions yielding twenty drawings and sixteen copies per child. The study found that the drawings and copies of children with disabilities were on a par with their non-disabled counterparts and, in some cases, the children with disabilities performed even better. The findings of this study suggest that art-making skills may develop along a path that is independent of general I.Q.

Through his research on adults with brain damage, Gardner has also come to believe that painting and linguistic skills can exist independently of one another. He proposes that skills in musical and visual tasks could be at least partially disassociated from linguistic skills. In his book *Art, Mind and Brain*, Gardner proposes that, like language, the arts are based on a unique symbol system, whose components can be organized in such a way as to communicate meaning.

> The arts are integrally and uniquely involved with symbol systems - with the manipulation and understanding of various sounds, lines, colours, shapes, objects, forms, patterns - all of which have the potential to refer, to exemplify, or to express some aspect of the world. (1982, p. 211)

Gardner goes on to suggest that "such shared capacities might be marshaled to aid individuals communicating with other persons" (p. 216). For my part, I would offer that akin to learning a language, participation in art activities can develop the individual's ability to make logical, orderly, abstract, subtle and humorous sense of the world. It could be that by becoming more proficient in the language of art and art making, individuals with cognitive challenges become better able to communicate and co-exist with people of diverse I.Q.

Learning Concepts

In *Getting it Wrong from the Beginning* (2004) Kieran Egan challenges Piaget and Spencer's view that children's minds develop in the same manner as their bodies. Egan asserts that children's imaginative lives defy Spencer's simple to complex argument. Like Egan, I believe that what we are able to express through words is not the sum total of what we are experiencing imaginatively. Piaget and Spencer's belief that learning goes from the simple to the complex is evident in current educational practice, in that we assume that students are not likely to grasp higher concepts if they haven't yet mastered lower ones. It is my belief that Piaget's 'building block' view of learning has negatively impacted students with cognitive disabilities because we assume that they are incapable of grasping more complex forms of thought until they show written or verbal evidence that they have mastered simpler ones. For this reason we tend to view these students in terms of what we think their 'mental age' is. However, we have to keep in mind that this mental age is being measured primarily in terms of their linguistic and logical intelligence. In my opinion we are diminishing these individuals by assuming they are and will be forever 'childlike' in their thinking.

One of the outcomes of this way of thinking is that it is very difficult to find age appropriate material for these students, as the subject matter of most of the material written in simpler language is not aimed at teenagers. I feel it is essential that we do not under challenge these students by our assumption that they are not capable of more complex thought. As mentioned earlier, it is my view that even though some cognitive abilities may be impaired, the imagination is still whole and

functioning. I would argue that the imaginative process of art making offers these students an ideal means with which to explore and express more sophisticated concepts.

Imagination is key, because as Maxine Greene points out, it is through developing the ability to imagine new possibilities that we are able to re-imagine ourselves. And it is in this process of "re-imagining" ourselves that we are able to make the shift from being someone who passively accepts an identity that is assigned to them, to becoming someone who is an active participant in creating their own identity. Inevitably, there is struggle and tension between being assigned an identity and authoring your identity. However, it is a struggle worth undertaking, as becoming co-creator of our identity is crucial to becoming author of our own story. This struggle is especially onerous for individuals who are intellectually challenged, as it is not easy for these students to negotiate an identity that goes beyond the powerful label of disability.

The notion that all students, even students without sophisticated linguistic and logical skills, need to form a voice in order to become co-author of their identity is at the crux of a study I initiated titled *The Story Project*. Even though the stories told by the teens are not literal stories, they are stories in the sense that they convey how the teens view and interpret themselves, and the world around them.

The Story Project

This project involved twelve adolescents whose ages ranged from 12 to 17 years old. The participants had a variety of disabilities, including Down syndrome, autism and Asperger's Syndrome; some of the teens had multiple diagnoses as well as physical challenges and a small percentage did not have English as a first language. Even though this study was carried out in a program in the community, it is my belief that the findings from this study could be transferred to classrooms, especially resource rooms in secondary schools. I will be discussing this more in depth in the next section.

I introduced the project to the participants by telling them it was called The Story Project. I explained that it was called this

because we all have a need to tell our stories. Furthermore, in order to tell our stories we need a language: talking and writing are two ways to tell a story but art making is yet another. I told the teens that I hoped that they would be co-creators of the project and that my role was to introduce them to the language of art. I explained that just as in music or written language, you cannot expect to create something until you have a working vocabulary and the ability to speak and think using this language. Keeping in mind, that the purpose of the study was to find alternate forms of language, discussion was kept to a minimum and the majority of the investigation was carried out through the language of imagination, movement and art making. In order to illustrate what I mean by this, I will describe how we explored 'line, shape and direction' and 'composition'. The activities I am about to describe took place over a number of months with the sessions lasting approximately an hour and a half to two hours in length.

We began our exploration of 'shape' with a physical warm-up that focused on breathing and by paying close attention to various body parts. After the warm-up was complete, the teens were asked to imagine that the air in the room was a canvas and that they had an endless supply of imaginary paint. Accompanied by music, the teens began to paint an assortment of shapes, imagining they had a paintbrush in their hands. After a few minutes, I asked them to pause and look around the room and tell me what they saw. At this point the teens were invited to throw their imaginary paintbrushes out the window and I suggested that they toss their hands out the window too, because we were going to use our bodies as paintbrushes. We proceeded to paint the room using a variety of shapes and body parts. Taking cues from the students, we painted 'triangles with our toes', 'squares with our shoulders' or 'anamorphous shapes with our hips'. Using the same method, we explored a range of lines such as 'straight', 'jagged' or 'curvy' lines. We also explored various directions and levels by painting lines backwards, forwards, low to the ground, and so on. From time to time we paused to look at what we were creating in the room and the students were encouraged to describe what they saw. After painting the lines and shapes in the air, the teens then re-created them on paper.

Composition was introduced by showing the teens images of paintings and photographs created by well-known artists such as Emily Carr and Georgia O'Keefe. Using the pictures as examples, I pointed out the basic elements of composition such as background, mid-ground, foreground and focal point. After viewing the pictures we moved to another part of the room for a physical warm-up. At the end of the warm-up, the teens lied down on mats and I led them through a breathing and visualization exercise in which I asked them to imagine a place they loved to be in. This place could have been inside or outside, it might have been beside a river, on the beach, or in a particular room. Once they had a clear image of the setting, the teens were asked to situate themselves inside the picture and to imagine what they are doing, feeling and so on. Students were directed to take a mental snapshot of their imaginary place, as they would be returning to it later.

We slowly came to standing, and I asked the teens to once again imagine that the air in the room was an empty canvas. Together, we moved to where the background, mid-ground and foreground would be. I invited them to envision the picture they had just created in their minds and to begin painting the background of their image. I encouraged them to choose a variety of colors, lines and shapes. As part of this activity, I asked them to periodically step away from what they were painting in order to look at it to decide if they wanted to make any changes. It is interesting to note that the teens were strongly absorbed in this part of the activity and repeatedly moved in and out of their imaginary paintings to make detailed changes.

At this point in the activity, the teens were asked to recall what they saw themselves doing in their imaginary place and to situate themselves in their painting. I reminded them that this was the 'focal point'; a spot that acts as a door or window inviting the viewer to enter. I explained that we wanted the focal point to stand out, so we needed to add darker colors to outline it, or to find other ways to make it stand out. The students re-entered the painting and added these details. Towards the end of the activity the teens were asked to step out of the painting to see if there were any final touches that they

wished to make. Once they were satisfied that the painting was complete, we sat down at a table with paper, paints and brushes and I invited them to choose the colors that were in their paintings in order to create a palette.

It is worth noting that it took the teens less time to actually produce an artwork on paper than it did to produce the imaginary 'air' paintings. This observation held true for all of the participants and was also apparent in subsequent sessions. In order to verify whether it was simply the order of activities that caused these differences, I changed the order of activities a few times but found that it didn't make a significant difference. I did find however, that drawing and painting to the same music that we used in the imaginary exploration seemed to extend their ability to concentrate during the painting on paper activity. Staff members commented that the level of concentration the students demonstrated during the 'imaginary painting' was very strong and that it was unusual for some of them to focus on a single activity for such an extended period of time.

The sessions were videotaped, so I was able to compare what the teens created as air paintings with what they produced on paper. We did this activity a number of times and I watched closely for similarities and differences between the imaginary, embodied air paintings and the work done on paper. It seemed clear that there were strong links between the two activities and when I asked the students if they had painted what they had created in the air, they indicated that they had.

One of the most significant developments in the project involved a student named Michael (not his real name) who has autism and very limited verbal language. At the beginning of the sessions Michael scribbled freely in his sketchbook paying no attention to background, foreground and so on. However, after a few sessions we noticed Michael doing something different in his drawings. He was creating a background of one color and then placing marks of many different colors on top of the solid color. Another significant development we observed, was that Michael started to get up during the painting and drawing sessions, moving to an other area of the table to select particular colors and then going back to work on his

artwork – again something that he had never done before. I believe that these developments indicate that he was thinking about the art he was creating and making specific choices regarding it.

We made the transition from drawing and painting to photography by asking the questions: "What do you like looking at and why?" and "Why do some things catch our attention?" These questions introduced the next stage of the project, which was to take photographs of the environment and the community. The initial idea was that each student would have his or her own camera. However, due to funding restrictions, we were not able to purchase cameras for each of the teens to use, so we had to come up with another way to incorporate photography in to our project. A few digital cameras were available to us, so we solved the problem of how twelve students could use two cameras by slowing down the picture taking process and having the teens work first with viewfinders. This process proved to be very valuable, because it meant that the students spent a considerable amount of time looking through the viewfinders in order to make informed choices about what they were going to photograph. An additional advantage of using the viewfinders was that it removed the element of randomness that can come with simply 'pointing and shooting' the camera.

We spent many weeks taking photos in the nearby community gardens, parks and related areas. Most days we began our sessions by examining the photos we had taken the previous day and identifying why some photos were more effective than others. Eventually, the teens made the shift from searching for and framing compositions to creating compositions of their own. To this end, we visited nearby parks and beaches and collected materials from nature such as rocks and branches to create compositions we called 'random acts of art'. Sometimes the teens created these on their own, but more often they chose to collaborate in pairs or small groups. After the compositions were complete the teens photographed them. It is interesting to note, that with no encouragement from the staff or myself, the teens moved from making two-dimensional compositions to three-dimensional sculptures. Again, as not-

ed in the earlier sessions, the staff noticed that the teens exhibited stronger than usual concentration and seemed to be very motivated when they were selecting materials, creating compositions and, then, photographing them.

The aforementioned activities are just a few examples of what we did during the project. During our sessions we also explored texture by taking texture rubbings from the environment, and spent time experimenting with printing and collage. For the final stage of the project, the teens created collaged self-portraits.

Inside the Classroom

Even though *The Story Project* took place outside of the classroom, it is my belief that the findings from the study can be drawn upon and applied to work that is being done inside our schools, especially in secondary settings. To my mind one of the key implications of the study is that students with cognitive challenges *can* learn the language of art. The principles and elements of art might need to be introduced and explored in a non-traditional manner, but from working closely with the students over an extended period of time, it is clear to me that students with restricted language skills are capable of forming and expressing meaning through the arts. It is important to point out that the kinds of activities I have described are not meant to replace regular art classes but are intended to act as a reinforcement and extension to them.

In the last two decades we have made real progress in promoting inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classes and hopefully we can continue to do so. However, as educators I think we need to allow ourselves to question and re-imagine our present model of inclusion. After many years of working in this field, I have come to see that inclusion is more than welcoming students with disabilities into mainstream activities and programs, it is also an exchanging and sharing of unique perspectives and approaches. Realistically, I know it is not easy to find ways to build positive relationships between non-disabled students and students with special needs in secondary settings. Clearly it is vital that students with disabilities are integrated into mainstream art classes,

but I have observed that far too often students with disabilities hold the status of 'visitor', interacting primarily with his or her educational assistant. A simple approach that might improve this situation would be to invite students in regular art classes to act as mentors and partner with students with disabilities. This could occur on a rotating basis so that eventually the students with disabilities have partnered with all of the students in the class.

 Another possibility would be to invite non-disabled students into the resource room in order to participate in art activities along side students with disabilities. This approach could act as a reversal of sorts - instead of thinking only of how to integrate students with special needs into mainstream classes it would offer a space for students without disabilities to experience different ways of learning and knowing. The idea would not be for the visiting students to 'help' the students with disabilities. Rather, both groups would have the opportunity to experience a different way of learning and creating art, thus laying the groundwork for relationships to form and evolve. Since the students with disabilities would be welcoming the non-disabled student into their class, they could experience what it means to be the host instead of the visitor; this would represent an additional benefit. For example, the students based in the resource room could also participate in the preparation of the visits by planning and organizing the art activities scheduled during the visit.

What would be the advantages for the non-disabled students? This arrangement could provide an opportunity for these students to form different kinds of relationships than the ones they typically have with their non-disabled peers. It would also suit students who are in need of a kinder, gentler and less judgmental atmosphere. One of the keys to successful inclusion is accepting students with a disability for who they are and realizing that we all have different strengths and abilities. Surely, developing a sense of empathy can be a benefit to all students. On a practical note, these visits could occur as part of students' community service hours.

The suggestions I am making here are based on my own ex-

perience working in resource rooms as well as on conversations that I have had with resource room teachers and educational aids. I have observed in resource rooms that there is a fair amount of 'down time' in the day when students do not have work to do and often they are given the choice between free time on the computer, or playing cards and board games. There is nothing inherently wrong with these choices, but I feel there are clear advantages to making art one of the choices. Simple activities such as 'daily drawing' could be incorporated into the everyday schedule and students could acquire sketchbooks to be used on a regular basis. The possibilities are many. It wouldn't be necessary for these activities to be lead by art teachers; if needed, resource room teachers and educational assistants could be offered professional development training by art educators.

As well, I believe that the kinds of activities described in *The Story Project* would not be difficult to incorporate into elementary classes. The model of 'daily art' in the form of silent drawing or collaborative art projects could easily be integrated into the daily curriculum. I have had the opportunity to teach some of these activities to elementary classes and the response from teachers and students alike has been very positive and enthusiastic. I have also led professional development workshops on this approach and the feedback that I have received from teachers who tried it with their students is encouraging: they found the activities to be worthwhile and engaging.

Whether it takes place in an elementary classroom or the secondary school resource room, I believe that engaging in art making on a regular basis, much in the same way students now practice reading and numeric literacy, can lead to aesthetic development and the ability to 'think in the arts'. Just as we see numerical, written and oral literacy as important and essential for all students, we should consider aesthetic literacy as one of the mainstays of education.

Teaching to Include

One of the essential components of creating an environment that fosters 'thinking in the arts' is the role of the teacher. Because she is in charge of creating an environment that is con-

ducive to learning, the teacher has many decisions to make including how she will physically set up the space, what materials she will make available, and the best way to plan.

In addition to setting up an environment that encourages creativity, the educator can serve as both a role model and an inspiration. If the attitude of the educator is an open one, this will naturally transfer to the participants. An open attitude on the part of the teacher is key because all too often as educators, we sometimes have expectations that can unintentionally restrict the very openness that we are trying to nurture in our students. Sometimes this comes from concentrating too much on the final product of art making activities and not enough on the art production process itself. We may have fixed ideas about the ideal outcomes of a lesson. This rigidity on our part can prevent students from making their own discoveries and developing their own 'internal locus of evaluation'. We have to be careful not to impose our own internal locus of evaluation onto our students; instead, we must encourage students to develop and monitor their own sense of aesthetic judgment and preferences. On a practical note, it is important to make sure that educational assistants or other support workers do not step in and do the artwork for the student. At times assistants may do this because they are worried that the student won't create 'good' artwork. I have found that one of the best solutions to this challenge is to encourage the assistant to participate fully by creating their own artwork alongside the students. In this way the educational assistants are serving as role models, thus reinforcing the idea that this work is worthwhile.

Along with creating an environment that nurtures the imagination of her students, it matters that the educator nurtures her own imagination, as Greene writes, "imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of students" (1995, p. 36). This is especially relevant when working with students with intellectual disabilities, because the instructor needs to imagine what it would be like to not to have strong skills in language and logic. I agree with Greene that empathy is crucial for creativity to occur, because without it we are not really listening and allowing others to form their own distinc-

tive voices. Empathy allows us to appreciate and encourage diversity of thought, expression and creative product. By modeling compassion, the educator is promoting an environment where cognition in the arts can occur without the restriction of censure. As well, a supportive environment allows the instructor to give criticism and suggestions because the participant knows they are accepted and encouraged. An environment of understanding also encourages students to participate in constructive self-criticism, as they are not overly concerned with being perceived as 'right' or 'wrong'.

Conclusion

In my view true inclusion for students with diverse needs and abilities is contingent on these students acquiring a language that will allow them to make sense of themselves and their world. Language is crucial, because as Taylor points out, we do not become fully formed selves in isolation; we become who we are in relationship and engagement with others. Without a language to articulate and express the deepest aspects of the self, individuals with cognitive challenges are destined to remain on the margins of our culture. However, it is possible that through the language of art, these individuals can inhabit a more central place in our culture.

The goal of inclusion is not uniformity. True inclusion means offering each student the opportunity to learn in a style and environment that maximizes his or her ability to fully develop as a human being. In terms of students with varying needs and abilities, I think we need to offer as many possibilities as we can, because artistic and aesthetic literacy may be the very thing that engages such students dialectically with themselves and others.

It is worth finding new ways to achieve inclusiveness; for, by expanding our notion of how students with diverse needs and abilities learn, the possibility exists that our present structure of education can be transformed in a small, but significant way. This transformation could lead to fresh ways of knowing and perceiving that could ultimately extend beyond our classrooms to society at large. One of the most positive outcomes might be that we begin to see 'thinking in the arts' as a valid

means for developing cognitive skills.

I believe that increased engagement with the arts could potentially benefit all students regardless of ability. Through the imaginative activity of art making, each student can be given the opportunity to discover and articulate his or her own distinctive voice. As a culture, we cannot afford to assume that some stories are not worth hearing. We need to expand our idea of whose dreams and images matter, for it may be the unlikeliest voice that offers the most potent vision.

References

Bailin, S. (1994). *Achieving extraordinary ends*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

British Columbia Ministry of Education Website (2006) retrieved on Feb.10, 2006 from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/.

Bantock, G.H. (1989). The arts in education. In P. Abbs (Ed.), *The symbolic order: A contemporary reader on the arts debate* (*pp.* 145-160). London: The Falmer Press.

Cropley, A. (1992). *More ways than one: Fostering creativity.* New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Egan, K. (2002). *Getting it wrong from the beginning: Our progressivist inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey and Jean Piaget.* London: Yale University Press.

Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the city.* New York: Continuum Publishing Company.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder

Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice*. New York: Basic Books Inc.

Gardner, H. (1991) *How children think and how schools should teach*. New York: Basic Books Inc.

Gardner, H. (1989) *Art, mind and education: Research from project zero.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Gardner, H. (1982). *Art, mind and brain*. New York: Basic Books Inc.

Gardner, H. (1975). *The shattered mind: The person after brain damage*. New York: Knopf Publishing.

Gibson, R. (1989). The education of feeling. In P. Abbs (Ed.), *The symbolic order: A contemporary reader on the arts debate* (pp. 53-61*)*, London: The Falmer Press.

Golomb, C. (2002). *Child art in context: A cultural and comparative perspective*. Washington, D.C: A.P.A.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers,

Krechevsky, I. & Seidel, J. (1999). Minds at work. *American Psychologist,* 33 (2), 45-58.

Langer, S., (1953). *Feeling and form: A theory of art.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons

Merleau- Ponty, M. (1968). *The visible and the invisible.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Roe, A. (1976). Psychological approaches to creativity in science. In A. Rothenberg & C. R. Hausman (Eds.),*The creativity question* (*pp.* 165-174) Durham: Duke University Press.

Rogers, C. R. (1976). Towards a theory of creativity. In A. Rothenberg & C. R. Hausman (Eds.),*The creativity question. (pp.* 296-305). Durham: Duke University Press.

Shouksmith, G. (1970). *Intelligence, creativity and cognitive style*. London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd.

Steeves, J. B. (2004) *Imagining bodies: Merleau- Ponty's philosophy of imagination.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Torrance, P.E. (1969). *Creativity*. San Rafael: Dimensions Publishing Co.

Wallach, M. A. & Kogan, N. (1976). Creativity and intelligence in children. In A. Rothenberg & C. R. Hausman (Eds.),*The creativity question* (*pp.* 208-216). Durham: Duke University Press.

Weisberg, R. (1993). *Creativity: Beyond the myth of genius*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Zigler, E. (2000). Two tails of the normal curve: Similarities and differences in the study of mental retardation and giftedness. *American Psychologist*. 24 (12), 23-31.