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Context

The classroom that inspired this inquiry includes 18 second-graders who attend art class for one 45-minute period each week. In the classroom, when given a choice of activity to do when all other work is completed, all of the students are content with drawing or coloring a picture. They become enthusiastic when art projects are introduced as a curriculum-related activity. At least two of the students display exemplary artistic abilities in their classroom artwork at all times. These students produce quality artwork that is comparable to the work of some intermediate students. The remaining students do not show consistency in the quality of their artwork between the products created in the art room and those created in the classroom. Specifically, when students are asked to illustrate their writing they often attempt to turn in an incomplete sketch with inadequate detail. At times some of these students show evidence of careful, detailed work, but at other times they show a lack of concern for quality and therefore work in a rushed, seemingly careless manner.

Since the classroom is fully equipped with a variety of art supplies, ranging from crayons to several kinds of paints and oil pastels, the students will be able to experience a wide range of these tools in order to increase their experience with different styles of art in order to increase motivation and art appreciation. From these observations and further wonderings was born my inquiry. Appendix A provides a more detailed explanation of rationale.

Main Wondering

How do you stimulate interest in art, and integrate it throughout the curriculum, adhering to an existing structured time schedule?

Further Questions:

• How can students’ artwork be used as a form of assessing what they know?
• How can displaying students’ artwork in several ways have a positive effect on their motivation levels, as well as help them take pride in their works?

• How can students benefit from reflecting on their artwork as well as the works of famous artists?

**Data Collection and Analysis**

**Student Surveys**

This survey provided insight on the thoughts of each student regarding him or herself as an artist, and a reason for the decreased quality of work from the art room to the classroom exhibited by some students. I recorded the accompanying discussion of each statement as students completed the survey in small groups at my center (Appendix B). I surveyed my students again orally at the end of the inquiry, and asked similar questions as well as additional questions that were more directly related to the inquiry. I also surveyed students after they showed their Artsonia webpages to their Book Buddies.*

**Rate Your Work**

Students periodically filled out a form that indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements referring to their artwork (Appendix C). I analyzed each survey by assigning a numerical value to each response, and looking across each student’s surveys to find patterns in their thinking. I was able to see trends and changes, particularly related to the students’ levels of pride.

**Rate the Artist**

I introduced the students to three artists. Pablo Picasso and Vincent van Gogh were two whom the students had not previously studied. Georges Seurat was an artist they had

* Students meet weekly to read with a 5th grade Book Buddy.
experience with in art class. After studying several of the artists’ works, attempting to create a piece in the technique of each artist, I had the students rate each artist. To do so, we created posters titled “We Think [artist name]’s work is….” Each student wrote an ending to the phrase on the posters, which were displayed in the classroom. I used them to explore the depth with which students responded to professionals’ work compared to how they responded to their own.

**The Mural**

I created a backdrop showing a portion of underground land, a cave, a tree complete with lifelike roots, and a large portion of sky in the form of a 20-foot long, 7.5-foot tall mural outside of our classroom. Throughout our studies of five animal groups as part of the Wonderful World of Nature unit, students contributed ideas and artwork for the mural. I held a class discussion and explained to students that it belonged to them, and they were responsible for showing the school community and visitors what were were studying in science. I planned art activities that allowed students to creatively express their knowledge. The students communicated what they needed on the mural in order for it to be scientifically accurate, and I observed them as they created artwork to display (Appendix D). I observed how they used factual information to represent animals truthfully.

**Artsonia**

Artsonia is the world’s largest online gallery of student artwork worldwide. There are over 19,000 participating teachers from 120 countries, and this year alone the Artsonia community has published over a million pieces of artwork (Artsonia). Anyone surfing the web has access to the Easterly Parkway Elementary School homepage (Appendix E), where they can view my students’ individual pages. I posted their artwork as we worked on the mural, and works that were created in math as well. Parents had the option to register their child in order to
approve comments that anyone made on their artwork, so I asked specific parents for feedback about their experience with Artsonia. I used the website to find out how students felt about others seeing their work. I videotaped their reactions the first time we viewed the site, and recorded the responses of individuals who had previously indicated a desire to keep their work private.

The Chatter Box

The Chatter Box is an actual box located in our classroom, and is designed for students to express any thoughts, stories or ideas they want to share with a teacher. As the mural progressed, students developed ideas to make it more realistic. Soon the box became stuffed with ideas for art projects and requests for time to add to the mural. As I read the notes from my students, I saw evidence of their learning. I used the notes to guide the progression of the mural and plan the remaining art activities in the classroom (Appendix F).

Claims and Evidence

Claim I. Young children’s artwork is a valuable form of assessment, and giving them the responsibility for creating art in order to express knowledge increases motivation and accuracy.

I found that the best way to integrate art into my classroom was as a form of assessment. Giving them the freedom to decide how to design a product increased the motivation levels in students, and fueled their creativity. I asked them what they would like to include in the mural in order to reach our goal of expressing our knowledge. I watched my students’ faces brighten, their hands fly above their heads, and their bodies turn toward one another in excitement. They clearly had a high interest in creating such a large-scale mural and were obviously enthused about the topic, as they were becoming experts on nature. This planning session already
provided valuable assessment data, and the artwork had not even begun. The students named each of the animal groups we had studied thus far, as well as animals that belong in each group, and the needs of particular animals. They requested that a pond be added to ensure that our amphibians had appropriate habitats and breeding places, and named specific plants, trees, and flowers that would need to be included based on the needs of living creatures. The Chatter Box notes shown in Appendix F are strong evidence of this as well.

We began implementing plans for the mural with an assessment on bird adaptations. I told the students to create a “Super Bird,” whose beak showed what kind of food the bird ate, body showed where it lived and could be camouflaged, and whose feet would show how the bird moved and another place it might live. The next challenge was for students to create the bird in the style of Vincent Van Gogh’s impressionism, using color pastels. The results were outstanding. Students were so enthused about the pastels and the work they saw from the artist that they immediately began collecting resources and creating sketches of their “Super Birds.” Not a single student was unable to tell me why his or her bird looked the way it did. It was valuable assessment because they could each explain to me orally and in writing that the bird they created look as it did because of the adaptations they had give this very super bird.

Appendix D shows an example of one of these birds and the accompanying writing. The bird pictured was named based on the student’s prior knowledge of prehistoric birds. The birds were published on Artsonia and hung on our mural to show what we were studying. I was able to see from the students’ writing and their bird creations that they had understood the concept of adaptations, a focus for each animal group throughout the unit. Additional assessments included “Finger-Print Pointillism Reptiles,” created to show that all reptiles have unique scales and skin
patterns, as well as various math artistic assessments, implemented as part of the Investigations curriculum during the study of symmetry and halves.

Claim II. Exploring a website like Artsonia results in increased technology skills.

The first time I took the students to the Artsonia website, I only showed them around and allowed them to explore. The noise level in the computer lab was an appropriate roar. They were blown away by the 2,695,586 pieces of work produced by United States students. I asked the students if they would like to explore the work of artists in other countries, and they literally applauded the idea. I taught them how to access the website and browse artwork by country.

I did not have to assist students in the computer lab at all because they were exploring the site with a goal in mind, and solving problems on their own. As I walked around the computer lab, I saw the students focused on their screens, smiling wildly, and viewing artwork from around the world, not from the United States. A student from India accessed his homeland galleries and felt great pride viewing what other second graders in his country had created. I was impressed by how quickly the students caught on to the design of the website and how easily they explored various countries’ exhibits, clearly due to the motivation that arose from their interest and enthusiasm to explore the museum. They were compelled to independently discover how to maneuver among the exhibits beginning with a country, moving into a specific city, followed by a school and then into an individual’s profile.

We often conduct lessons in the computer lab that require students to access a specific page on a website, and I am overwhelmed with the sound of my name coming from all corners of the room. I normally approach a student only to hear whining beginning with “I can’t.” Most of the time what the student could not do was be bothered to follow the text on the screen. Not this day. The students were completely independent because they were engaged in what they were
doing. I knew that the class had learned how to access the website because they were able to show their Book Buddies their artwork, and also show parents at home. The site allowed students to discover additional uses for technology as well. Several students learned that they could upload photographs of their artwork from home, and began to do so outside of class.

The computer competencies in second grade involve using the mouse to perform intricate tasks. The more practice students have clicking, dragging and highlighting, the easier it is for them to use those movements to complete specific actions required in mathematics lessons that utilize Investigations software. These students are also required to complete a research project, focusing on a particular animal of their choice. These students have seen evidence in the classroom of how quickly they can find information on the web. As long as they can figure out how to navigate a safe site, they are able to retrieve facts, record information, and use it to their benefit. The ease with which they did so on Artsonia transferred to their next visit to the computer lab, when they were conducting animal research. I reminded students of how they looked for key words and knew how to tell when they could click a link and when it was “un-clickable,” and I found that far less students were asking questions that they could answer on their own. Artsonia increased independence on the Internet in a safe way, and the motivation the site provided provide opportunities for students to practice the technology skills they need while enjoying art from around the world.

Claim III: Displaying students’ artwork online leads to a stronger connection between the school and the home, and a stronger community within the classroom.

I found during the final survey that many students access the site with a parent almost daily! Not only are parents involved, but extended family members have also registered as Fan
Club members*. Our class has a total of 74 Fan Club members, and 36 comments have been made on individual pieces as of April 22, 2008. 1,617 visitors have visited the school’s Artsonia webpage. All of these statistics provide evidence that students and their family members are visiting the site frequently, and because of the nature of the artwork, families are seeing what students are learning in school. One student and his father indicated at a parent-teacher conference that before Artsonia, their family in India had no way to see what the student was studying in school. Another parent expressed the same outcome as a result of Artsonia, except the extended family members reside across the United States from Florida to Texas.

Many students’ parents have also started galleries of artwork from home, which means that their parents had to take pictures of work they created and upload them on to the website. I know from my experience with this process that it takes patience, time, and familiarization with the site in order to successfully upload work. The six pieces on one student’s home gallery prove that his parents valued the benefits of Artsonia and felt it valuable to post additional work (Appendix G). These parents and others expressed sincere gratitude for my utilizing Artsonia.

Artsonia provided evidence that students were also very interested in one another’s pages. They logged on and visited our classroom page, noticing our current ranking as a school, and highlighted comments that had recently appeared on a peer’s page. They exhibited a strong sense of pride as a class, being the only one in the school to be published on the website, and the only active school in the district to participate. The reactions to awards given to other students and positive comments written about their work were encouraging and upbeat. Students also made comments on each other’s artwork from home. They also joined one another’s Fan Clubs. One student told me that she joined the Fan Clubs of students who had little or no members, and

* Fan Club members register to post comments and receive email notifications from Artsonia.
makes comments on students’ works who do not have many comments either. Many others showed this same sensitivity and care for one another online. I often hear students asking one another if they have received the comment he or she left for a friend, and looking at the comments

Claim IV: Reflecting on original artwork and the work of artists increases students’ pride and confidence as artists.

Using Artsonia as a way for students to reflect on their work impacted the way they viewed their artwork. I found that students learned about themselves and increase their confidence by doing so, and also that critiquing a professional’s work can assist students in the self-reflection process. When I asked students to rate their work before we visited Artsonia with Book Buddies and students saw their comments from friends and family members, 5 of them indicated that they agreed with the statement “I am happy with the way this piece looks,” when the “strongly agree” option was available. 3 of them responded with “disagree,” and 1 with “strongly disagree.” When students rated their work after showing their book buddies, 16 of the students strongly agreed with the statement, and only two simply agreed.

As the students read their comments and reviewed their works, I could see a newfound pride in each and every one of them. This increase in pride resulted from the interaction between the buddies and the professionalism that the site exudes. Without seeing all of the exciting statistics and reactions of others online, the students were left to judge their work independently. At the second-grade age, students are hard on themselves when critiquing the quality of their artwork. They have a strong desire to produce life-like creations and often feel discouraged when comparing their work to other students’. Isolating their work and surrounding it in positive
feedback as Artsonia does has an encouraging effect on students, and it altered the way they viewed their work. Looking back on their work, they were proud of it because they were able to reflect upon the upbeat experiences around sharing what they created with others.

As students studied various famous artists in order to imitate their techniques, I asked them to critique the artists’ works just before they rated their own. The students reviewed several pieces and practiced describing what they liked about the art in a focused, mature way. They were able to dig deeper than how “pretty” the pieces were, and came up with descriptions such as “emotional” and “inspiring.” Appendix I shows the posters we made as we revisited the works of three artists. As I encouraged them to be specific about how they felt when they looked at the pieces, I noticed that they were really feeling the emotions the artists intended to elicit in viewers. Soon, the students were reflecting on their own work and the language recurred.

The first time I asked students to rate their work, they “strongly agreed” that they were proud of a piece, but gave written explanations such as “because it is pretty,” or “because I like it.” These artificial responses decreased, and students later gave deeper responses that showed what was actually important to them in a piece of art. One student wrote, “I took my time making it.” This was a student who said that Picasso’s work was “carefully done.” I asked her that day if she thought he had really taken his time on that piece, and she agreed that he probably had, and that it impacted the quality of the art. Another student wrote, “I used colors to show happiness.” They began to understand that they can use art to communicate stories, what they learned, and now feelings. They also commented on one another’s work on Artsonia in a more thoughtful way. As Appendix H shows, the comments became more specific and referred to valuable aspects of art, such as detail and careful work.
Reflections and Future Implementation

As I reflect upon the past months of my inquiry, I am realizing the vast amount of change my research has gone through as part of my learning. At first I was concerned with the quality of my students’ artwork in the classroom, particularly their illustrations. As I learned more about the writing process, I understood that the students were starting with a sketch of their ideas, and then beginning to write. It was then that I realized that quality was not of utmost importance in those situations. When my students illustrate their work after they have written, they are careful and show very high quality. I shifted my focus to integrating art in the future event that I am forced to compensate for the lack of a specialist in the art department, and I still wanted the quality to be present. I also feel it is important to integrate art into the regular classroom in conjunction with an art teacher, as well as music and bodily movement. As I tried several art activities with my students, I was attempted to make them as meaningful as possible and to fit them into an already structured classroom. I learned that the time it takes to create valuable, unique, quality artwork is much longer than the average school day permits. I realized that I had to find a way to make the process take less time, and my answer was found when I spoke to the art teacher and learned what my students already knew how to do. I was able to save 20-30 minutes of time that I previously spent introducing and artist and technique, and instead created projects from the artists and techniques the art teacher had introduced beforehand. I also considered the fact that it may not be possible for me to refer to an art teacher to save time this way, and that I may be the only person to expose children to artists and the various forms of art. At this point I had to think about art in the form of inquiry, and that was when I made it the students’ responsibility to design the mural and future projects to include in it.
I realized that they are capable of taking on the challenge, and that they are overly enthusiastic to do so. In the future I can have my students tell me what they have created before, what artists they have heard of, and how they feel about art, just as I was able to gather information from them with the initial survey.

Taking the time to allow students to use their creativity to show what they learned was exceptionally valuable. The students were able to show their unique talents through the use of a variety of mediums. They enjoyed the activities and it was a wonderful way to assess their understandings. I believe students should be assessed in a way that is comfortable for them and that they should feel confident showing teachers what they are thinking. I learned that for many students, art was the key. For some, it is writing, and for others it is numbers. I intend to consider my students’ individual strengths as I assess them, and now I am able to do so with art in a timely, efficient manner.

I plan to continue utilizing Artsonia because of the numerous benefits I observed throughout this inquiry. My classroom is only in the beginning phase of using Artsonia, and I am certain I will find even more positive outcomes of having the online gallery. The motivation, confidence, as well as the home and school community building it provided are indispensable. After seeing my students’ reactions the first time we visited the site, and every time thereafter, I cannot imagine neglecting to give my future students that same enlightening experience. The site allows the students’ work to remain until a parent or teacher removes it. I intend to leave the work online as long as possible in hopes that my students will return to their pages as they grow older, and hopefully they will continue to add work from home as well. Artsonia creators have a dream that all children will have an online gallery from the beginning of their schooling until they graduate. I am in full support of that long-term goal and wish to do my part in ensuring that
it is reached among my students. I will spread my experience with the site to other teachers in schools around the country in hopes that they may participate as well.