

Pre-service Elementary Generalist Teachers: Developing Competencies to Teach Visual Arts through the *Studio Habits of Mind* as a stance and artistic disposition

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Article abstract

This qualitative case study investigates the development of perceived competency for teaching visual art in pre-service generalist teachers and their readiness to use visual arts in their future elementary classrooms through a visual art methodology course. Pre-service generalist teachers' feelings of preparedness and sense of efficacy are both important indicators of whether they will be able to meet the challenges of incorporating visual arts in their future classrooms and as effective 21st century educators. To achieve this aim, the study considered in-depth firsthand experiences of four pre-service teachers and their course instructor for the entire semester during their training. The uncertainty of understanding the role of visual arts in contemporary education, lack of personal confidence, and prior negative experience in visual arts are some of the contributing fear factors. Scholars suggest that this thinking can be changed through appropriate experiences, influences and environments provided during the pre-service training stage. Findings illustrate that pre-service teachers indicated an optimistic shift in their confidence to pursue visual arts with a refreshed mindset, by applying the Studio Habits of Mind within learning and teaching visual arts.

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Pre-service Elementary Generalist Teachers: Developing Competencies to Teach Visual Arts through the *Studio Habits of Mind* as a stance and artistic disposition

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Shruti is an enthusiastic art educator with a passion for working with young children and adults. Originally from India, presently she is pursuing a PhD in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. She completed her master's in Art Education from the Maryland Institute College of Art. She was recognized as a "Model Teacher" by the Baltimore Public City School System, Maryland, U.S.A. She very passionately continues her journey as an artist, teacher, and researcher.

This qualitative case study investigates the development of perceived competency for teaching visual art in pre-service generalist teachers and their readiness to use visual arts in their future elementary classrooms through a visual art methodology course. Pre-service generalist teachers' feelings of preparedness and sense of efficacy are both important indicators of whether they will be able to meet the challenges of incorporating visual arts in their future classrooms and as effective 21st century educators. To achieve this aim, the study considered in-depth firsthand experiences of four pre-service teachers and their course instructor for the entire semester during their training. The uncertainty of understanding the role of visual arts in contemporary education, lack of personal confidence, and prior negative experience in visual arts are some of the contributing fear factors. Scholars suggest that this thinking can be changed through appropriate experiences, influences and environments provided during the pre-service training stage. Findings illustrate that pre-service teachers indicated an optimistic shift in their confidence to pursue visual arts with a refreshed mindset, by applying the Studio Habits of Mind within learning and teaching visual arts.

Keywords: *Pre-Service, Teacher Education, Competency, Self-efficacy, Studio Habits*

I see myself as a teacher, an artist and a researcher generating questions out of the daily art classroom issues, my visual art teaching practice and seeking possible solutions through contemporary scholarship. My interest in researching pre-service teacher education intersects with my profession as an art educator and my current position as a sessional instructor in the education program at a public university. After growing up in India and completing my master's in art education at the Maryland Institute College of Art, I was fortunate to teach as an elementary/middle school art teacher in Baltimore. Albeit it was a contractual position, my role in the school system as a model teacher required me to mentor novice teachers and conduct professional development sessions for teachers relating to visual art education and arts integration. These roles have also required me to mentor pre-service generalist teachers, as well as pre-service art teachers in my art room and connect with faculty and instructors teaching in teacher education programs. I am currently pursuing a PhD in Art Education at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at a public university in British Columbia.

I believe art education is one of the ways to encourage the new generation of teachers to create pedagogical practices and develop personal inclinations that nurture deep learning and thinking. Through the arts and experiences in purposeful play, improvisation and innovation; I would argue that teachers and students open conceptual and pedagogical spaces to enable connections between different subjects, and become curious about the process-based nature of exploration and inquiry. According to Pavlou (2021), developing pre-service teachers' skills as visual artists is important if we want then to be able to extend this understanding to the students and thus,

seeing the relevance of visual art education in conjunction with developing artistic habits for them will support an interest to pursue visual arts outside of their teacher training.

Various models of art education, namely by Studio Thinking (Hetland et al., 2013), Inquiry-based learning (Davis, 2022) and Arts Integrated Curriculum (Silverstein & Layne, 2020) promote visual literacy and creative expression in unique ways since they encourage “active learning” in contrast to lectures and memorization (Davidson, 2018). Of particular interest in my study is the work done by the researchers with Harvard University’s “Project Zero” (Hetland et al., 2013). In view of improving arts education, they identified The Eight Studio Habits of Mind, a pedagogical and creative approach focusing on art studio habits which can be successfully translated to non-art classrooms. The use of these habits of mind can make learning an active process, in both traditionally creative and traditionally academic disciplines.

My research aims to identify effective ways to develop positive approaches toward the visual arts in pre-service generalist student teachers that will help build their confidence to teach visual arts in their classrooms despite their non-art backgrounds. We are aware of the relevance of art education as it generates a broad range of benefits for students hence the effective delivery of the arts curriculum becomes crucial for schools and universities. Moilanen & Mertala (2020) conducted a study related to memories of visual art education from different phases of their educational path for first-year pre-service early childhood generalist teachers and reported “positive memories of integrated arts projects from early childhood and primary education” (p.17) as compared to secondary education. The level of involvement in teaching art is often dependent on the personal art experience of the teacher, and thus scholars suggest that the uncertainty of understanding the role of visual arts in contemporary education, lack of personal confidence, and prior negative experience in visual arts are some of the contributing fear factors leading generalists to resisting incorporating visual arts in their curriculum (Denée et al., 2023; Hunter-Doniger & Herring, 2017). Yet, scholarship also suggests that this perception can be changed through appropriate experiences, influences and environments provided during the pre-service training stage (Hunter-Doniger & Herring, 2017; Lindsay, 2021). It is recommended that during their initial training stage pre-service teachers encounter successful experiences to be able to pursue creative endeavors with competence to develop a higher sense of self-efficacy.

My Case Study: Observation of a Visual Arts Methods Course for Elementary Generalists

It is often said teachers teach the way they were taught (Denée et al., 2023). While there are many processes and pathways through which creative potential is realized, according to O’Neill and Schmidt (2017) the redesigned curriculum for elementary schools in British Columbia implemented in 2016/2017 [<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/arts-education>] supports developing skills for the twenty-first century. As outlined by the National Art Education Association (NAEA), these skills are: “Flexibility and Adaptability; Initiative and Self-Direction; Social and Cross-Cultural Skills; Productivity and Accountability; and Leadership and Responsibility” (NAEA, 2016, p. 1). After changing the name from “Fine Arts” to “Arts Education”, the BC curriculum outlined “a concept-based design focused on acquiring “artistic habits of mind” such as “creating and exploring, reasoning, and reflecting, and communicating and documenting” with “an infusion of First Peoples’ or Aboriginal principles of learning that emphasize an experiential and holistic learning environment” (p. 119).

My case study therefore sets out to explore how a visual arts methods course addresses issues of self-efficacy and whether it has a positive influence on generalist pre-service teachers. To achieve this aim, the study considered in-depth firsthand experiences of four pre-service teachers during the early stages of their training, as well as their course instructor. By generating data through my observations (13 classes/studio sessions), documents analysis (course outlines, visual journals), and individual interviews, this case study aims to better understand and highlight, how and what pedagogical practices encourage positive change in generalist teacher candidates’ feelings of personal competency to teach visual arts.

I attended class sessions during the thirteen-week winter term to collect data for my case study. I took on the roles of participant, observer and instructor’s assistant within the classroom. Art projects targeting studio habits along with the written reflection by the participant pre-service teachers in their visual journal, the feedback given by the instructor and my lesson observation notes contributed to my understanding of the student experience. This case study does not claim any generalizations in terms of best practice, as the findings focused on the journey of only four participant pre-service teachers and

their course instructor. On the other hand, drawing from Harland (2014), who states that case study research is a mode of learning that can potentially influence the researcher's own practice, I was interested to see how my research and observation of a methods course might inform my own teaching practice and be generative for other art educators.

Experience Element of the Course - The Studio Habits of Mind

During the semester course I observed, the main objective was to support and introduce the pre-service teachers to the process of thinking like an artist. The methods course also focused on helping students understand the provincial curriculum materials and standards required for teaching art in elementary and secondary schools in British Columbia.

The course instructor focused on developing Studio Habits of the Mind (Hetland et al., 2013) through various art projects. Lois Hetland and her team classified and named eight studio habits which include: Develop Craft, Engage & Persist, Envision, Express, Observe, Reflect, Stretch & Explore and Understand Art Worlds. These eight habits are not required to be taught in any particular sequence or combination. Hetland et al. devised a studio thinking approach illuminating how the art making process used by art educators could also be used by generalist teachers to encourage students to think deeply about their work. By presenting these habits, the instructor's focused on pre-service teachers becoming more mindful of their practice, inviting them to reflect on their strengths as artists and to seek ways to independently express their ideas visually. Using an art-based inquiry is a creative pedagogy that aligns with contemporary art education teaching and learning techniques (Davis, 2022). Pre-service teachers during the course engaged in open-ended inquiry, group discussion and problem solving. These approaches offered by the instructor encouraged students to become thoughtful, motivated, collaborative, and innovative learners embracing uncertainty in the constantly changing world. They expressed their enthusiasm to carry the approach forward to their classrooms because they saw potential in the results achieved in their own art creations and realized that they were appreciating the process along with the product. The participants explored their artistic interests through visual forms, autobiographical documentation of experiences and experiments, and reflections in their journals. Scott-Schields, (2016) confirms visual journal as a "form of creative self-study (p. 5) and "companion to creative research endeavors" (p. 9). In the following discussion, I examine some of the projects and experiences planned by the instructor targeting the "Studio Habits of the Mind". In this paper, I briefly describe some of the views that were shared by the participant pre-service teachers while engaging with the Identity Maps project, a visit to an art gallery, and their visual journals. I reflect upon and share as they become aware of the studio habits and discover the process of understanding, approaching, and creating visual art.

Planned Experience (Studio Habits – Developing Craft, Envision, Reflection)

Sample Project - Identity Maps

The first project based on studio habits planned by the instructor was creating an identity map to explore their own histories through visual language and verbal reflection. During the research interview, the instructor mentioned how she wanted the students to start this artistic process as a personal inquiry, right from the beginning of the semester; it was a way to enable them to understand how they can create an art piece based on their personal interests, personal identities and where they come from. Using this valuable knowledge from their past, they can further explore ideas about art and our society.

This foundational project was an entry to unfamiliar ground, the participant pre-service teachers mentioned in the initial interview that were not used to personalising their art content, they were more familiar with step by step directed art activities. Through my time in the studio and my direct observations, I noticed that the participant pre-service teachers, though initially inhibited, began to realize that in visual arts education, the focus should be on the development of creative thinking and personal expression through independent exploration and experimentation. Simply put, the process of creating is as important as the product. There was satisfaction in exploring the self, owning the piece, and proudly sharing it with peers. It was evident when I observed the session that they were keen to know about each other's histories. In summary, the research participants reacted positively towards the artistic process that was introduced to them through the mapping activity, albeit with some initial hesitation as it was a new experience for them. During the interview conversations


with me they all appreciated the independent approach and freedom, instead of the step-by-step guidance to create their piece that they were familiar with. The instructor provided the necessary guidelines for the implementation of the project, allowing freedom to choose their theme and encouraged media experimentation. With the intention of giving attention to pre-service teachers' personal goals and values, the instructor also encouraged independent thinking. According to Deci and Ryan (2015), "autonomous motivation is typically accompanied by the experience of positive affect, flexibility, and choice" (p. 486). Most pre-service participant teachers mentioned utilising this satisfying experience into their future classrooms in their journals. The other factor is the positive emotional state of the participants while performing the task and enthusiasm to share their creations. While analysing the reflections in their journals, I observed a clear indication of elevated satisfaction experienced whilst tracing their personal histories aligned with the independence to create the product and share it with their peers. I observed their in-class presentations and the feedback the students gave each other in the form of appreciation and technical suggestions. I considered it as a significant opportunity provided by the instructor to know themselves and their peers better.

The feeling of being connected or belonging to a group improves the social environment of the classroom to promote positive group attitudes, motivating each other to actively engage and feel successful (Marshik et al., 2017; Mulvihill and Martin, 2019). Through this experience, the pre-service teachers perceived independence and relatedness as approaches to build self-confidence and positive relationships between themselves and a possible strategy that could be useful in their future classrooms.


Planned Experience (Studio Habit - Understanding art worlds)

Element of the course- the gallery visit as experiential learning.

During the semester, the pre-service teachers were introduced to contemporary artists and their practices through artist videos relating to the art projects and a planned gallery visit. When the instructor briefed the pre-service teachers about the upcoming gallery visit, some of them acknowledged that it was a first-time experience for them, although some mentioned visiting museums on personal family trips. Pre-service teachers visited the Legacy Art Gallery, exhibiting, *Derrumbeat: The Beat of Collapse* curated By Dr. Alexandrine Boudreault Fournier, a sonic collage from materials collected from the abandoned sites in Cuba. At the gallery, I observed that the instructor as well as the gallery curators gave student teachers briefing about the current exhibit and artists involved and browsed through the artifacts with them. They were quite awe struck as the exhibit required them to be involved with the artists' creations, they were able to interact with the art pieces. This layered project consisted of music, anthropology, and photography focusing on how these elements can facilitate ways of thinking, reflecting, and imagining. Pre-service teachers had the time to walk around and were asked to think about their personal connections with the artworks and relate those connections to the social issues that were highlighted through the exhibition. The student teachers participated in embodied learning activities encouraging them to listen to sounds, look at images and create stories about the space and write words/phrases that came to their mind. They were given a curatorial challenge of placing two artifacts that were not placed side by side in the exhibit, and to share how that would change the way the objects are read. After they individually worked on the assignment, they shared their experiences as a group in the gallery space. The idea was to experience how to approach or interact with an art piece from the perspective of an artist and then have a personal point of view to make an informed judgment. The pre-service teachers engaged in critique, shared their reactions to the gallery visit as learners and as facilitators and discussed what can be offered to elementary and middle years students through art museum and gallery visits. In their journal reviews about the gallery experience, they redefined their understanding of visual art affirming that art had so much more to it than just being aesthetically pleasing. Through this gallery visit, they were exposed to contemporary visual art, but it is also significant to point out that the course instructor demonstrated how to organize a field trip for students. She provided a thorough understanding of the preparation, including relevant information, guidance, appropriate conduct, and gallery behavior management. The instructor was able to provide a rich experience thanks to her background in visual gallery management and curating. No doubt such vicarious experiences are beneficial for building pre-service teacher confidence in exploring contemporary art worlds and the big ideas included in the new BC curriculum (<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/arts-education>). Davis (2017) argues that providing high quality arts education to pre-service and in-service teachers must look into embodied and experiential learning "that value and appreciate the shared contribution of children



"While analysing the reflections in their journals, I observed a clear indication of elevated satisfaction experienced whilst tracing their personal histories aligned with the independence to create the product and share it with their peers."




and teachers within active learning environments, exploring diverse different modes and forms of human expression" (p. 335).

According to Mulvihill and Martin (2019), by providing experiences that enhance understanding of the social contribution of visual art like equity, diversity, inclusion and justice for all, the instructor provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to see how the teaching profession integrates social values. They assert that pre-service teachers who experience these values personally feel more committed and supportive towards the teaching profession and confident to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy in their own classroom.


Planned Experience (Studio Habits- Reflection, Explore, Envision)

Sample Project – Visual Journal

Drawing from my interviews, in terms of time investment, one of the important components in the visual art methods course was the visual journal. The instructor provided an opportunity to reflect on the daily classroom projects and a space for students to draft their projects before finalizing them. The pre-service teachers presented thoughts, ideas and reflections on the various topics discussed in class, as well as their assigned chapter readings and articles. The journals were visually pleasing because the participants responded with a mixture of visuals and texts. They expressed themselves with assorted choices of media to explore and practice art making techniques. They were developing decision-making skills and strengthening their visual vocabularies through media explorations without inhibition because prompts were open ended. Even though some of the participant pre-service teachers found the activity "time consuming" because "it took time to think and respond along with other assignments" they felt it was a required resource for the course. The course instructor speculated that the reason for having to spend the extra time and anxiety was due to their inexperience working independently in visual arts. Despite initial anxiety, the pre-service teachers stated that visual journaling was enjoyable, satisfying, and personally meaningful. As the semester progressed, the pre-service teachers settled into the routine and the repetitive familiarity of the task made it easier for them to respond in their visual journals. These findings resonate with Pavlou's (2021) study where she concluded that, reflective practice through visual journals can challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, enhance generalists' self-efficacy in their abilities to teach art, deepen their inquiries, promote ownership of learning and autonomy in teaching, thus laying the foundation for ongoing professional development in art education (p. 267).



"During class, I observed a shift in attitude towards approaching art projects, from a confused hesitant approach to an inquiry-based approach"



Towards the end of the semester, the participant pre-service teachers shared their overall experience and their plans regarding teaching art in their future classrooms. During class, I observed a shift in attitude towards approaching art projects, from a confused hesitant approach to an inquiry-based approach. They were looking forward to researching the project, to envisioning and planning, to creating using assorted media with confidence, to reflecting, and eventually showing the enthusiasm to share. Reflecting on their semester, the participant pre-service teachers made positive inferences towards the experiences planned by the instructor in their journals. During their interview conversations, collectively they valued the journaling experience as a space that was created to reflect and practice. The participants appreciated their time with hands-on activities where they created artwork in the studio and the introduction to various contemporary artists helped them understand the art world. The exposure to contemporary artists through videos and gallery visits provided vicarious experiences that helped them understand art worlds and how visual artists create their artwork. The participants reflected on how this was a great way for students to become critical independent thinkers, the concept of embodied learning, peer interaction and engaging with artwork rather than just viewing art was mentioned in their journal writing.

Closing thoughts

This case study research shares findings that taking a visual art methods course focused on studio habits of the mind may increase the participant pre-service teachers' confidence in engaging with visual art. The experiences discussed in this article emphasize that pre-service teachers developed personal visual art making skills with opportunities to explore materials, experiment with art media and techniques. Mastery of visual art content knowledge helped them feel confident and successful as emerging artists. Sustained reflection individually through visual journals encouraged problem solving and collectively through classroom discussions and collaborations added to the

constructive environment for the classroom. Engagement in arts inquiry-based projects and the gallery visit provided a fresh outlook by exploring contemporary approaches in visual art education instead of creating aesthetically pleasing products. Often, they discussed their emotions in their journals and during interview conversations. Sometimes they were confused, amazed to see a plethora of art forms, astonished to see the endless possibilities, and intrigued by how artists dealt with ambiguity. According to Mulvihill and Martin (2019), it is imperative to take seriously students “ability to think, learn and create” and “purposeful teaching requires understanding one’s aim, orienting towards the future, planning actions to support the aim and having self-efficacy to achieve the aim” (p. 203). The participant pre-service teachers in this case study mastered visual art content by creating several art projects inspired by the eight Studio Habits of the Mind. They gained confidence in their own art production, realized the potential of art and its relevance to promote 21st century learning skills. Even though participant pre-service teachers felt able to accomplish the art projects as university students, nonetheless they needed more experience of how to translate these activities for younger students. As a concluding thought about the semester in their journal, it was mentioned that they understood and could use studio habits themselves, yet they felt the need of a more practical experience with young students to feel more confident operating with this approach.

After spending a semester of observation and being with the teacher candidates in their methods course, I had the opportunity to teach the art methods course in the same university. While preparing the course, my observations, document analysis, conversations, and conversations with the participants experienced during the research study led me to revisit my course outline. I thoughtfully indulged in promoting autonomy by creating more open-ended and independent art projects, actively incorporating reflective practice through visual journaling, promoting inquiry and expanding pre-service teachers’ understanding of art worlds through experiential learning. My goal was to enhance pre-service teachers’ ability to expand their inquiries, take ownership of learning and autonomy in visual art production, and thus enhance their proficiency in teaching visual art.

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