

Our French Immersion Kindergarten students from Northeastern Elementary School participated in an artistic collaboration with Johanna Westby's Art and Design students from Cambrian College. Johanna and I began talking about a collaboration with our students about one year ago. We knew that we wanted our kindergarten students to have the experience of being artists in a real studio. Johanna brought the project to the next level by suggesting that her College students create their own art as a reflection of their experience with the Kindergarten students. The College students taught our Kindergarten students how to use a variety of art materials, chalk pastels, charcoal, paint. They gave them lots of time to explore while getting to know them. The young artists were then asked the question: "If you could do something to change the world, what would you do?" Johanna also suggested the question.

The answers that our students gave were thoughtful, creative, and beautiful.

The Art and Design students then reflected upon their dialogues with our students, and the art works they created, to engage in their own artistic projects. Two months later, the works were displayed together in Cambrian College's art gallery - "Open Studio." The exhibit also had quotes from the children, and photography by one of our parents - Amanda Sharp. She captured the essence of our students' engagement.

From the kindergarten point-of-view, we wanted our students to have the experience of being artists in a real studio. To have the opportunity to work with artistic role-models, and to perceive themselves as artists. The results of this project have exceeded our wildest dreams. The students were so engaged with their role-models and their art, that they didn't even want to stop working to have lunch. This level of engagement has translated into the classroom. Our students perceive themselves as capable artists. Seeing their artwork in a real gallery space has given them an additional pride in their work that we hope they will always keep with them.

-students naming who they are as learners. (Jen)

Charlie's artistic and literary expression usually involves drawing pictures of zombies, ninjas or minecraft people. He uses different comic book texts as reference such as "Capitaine Bobette," creates his own visual stories, and is beginning to add speech bubbles with text. While working with his student artist, Charlie had a significant amount of time to experiment with chalk pastels and paint. He was focused and engaged with his role-model and the art-making process for a significant amount of time. When Charlie was asked what he could do to change the world, he chose a material with a high degree of control. With markers, he drew a precise picture of a camera which was very uncharacteristic of him.

"It's a camera. So it could change the world. I'm going to take pictures of the world to show people who can't see it. The sky, houses, cars. So people could see it, like Africa, Toronto, Canada."

Our students' emotional and visual connections with their art-making experience was so strong, that even 2 months later (just before the exhibit) while reflecting upon the project, they were able to precisely describe their art works, including lines, shapes and colours - some of them actually reproduced their pieces. They also remembered their discussions, and the meaning behind them.

Two months later Charlie and his classmates' work was displayed in an art show - Tadem. Many different people attended the art exhibit opening. The students, Kindergarten and College, Families, members of the community, other artists were present to celebrate the achievements of the students. Watching the kindergarten children interact in the studio space allowed us to observe their pride in action. They took their friends by the hand and brought them to see their classmates work. They were clinked little plastic cups filled with sparkling water.

(Emily's reflection)

When I think about how I would adapt this documentation for Charlie's report card, or all of my students for that matter, I am torn about how I would divide it into boxes. Because, for Charlie, this was not a boxed experience, it was an organic experience that he lived without thinking about what he was learning and how it fit into the curriculum.

How do we give justice to Charlie's holistic experience if we need to break it apart into different boxes? I feel that I am devaluing his experience. The boxes limit my ability to describe his full growth in learning, because it falls within ALL of the boxes. This learning experience addresses the essential components of the four areas of the curriculum.

Relationships were such an important part of this learning experience. As educators, we have nurtured trusting relationships with our students, many for two years. Their ideas are valued and influence the directions that our learning takes. We started with the premise that our students are capable artists, that they would be able to create art that communicated complex ideas through a visual context.

Within Belonging and Contributing, Charlie has connected in a meaningful way to an artistic community with his classmates, the College students, his family, other families, other artists, the public, and various environments. The environments of the art studio and the gallery played a significant role in the students' perception of their work, and how others perceived and valued their contribution. They (studio and art gallery) elevated the importance of their creations.

Charlie (and the other students') learning demonstrates "attributes and attitudes that inform citizenship, through [his] sense of personal connectedness to various communities" (Curriculum p. 14).

Within Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Charlie expressed his thinking and feelings visually and verbally with depth. Charlie demonstrated self-awareness, a sense of self and pride, and developed a high level of self-regulation. Charlie made decisions about materials and subject area on his own to communicate his learning. The environments also influence these areas.

Demonstrating Literacy and Math behaviours,

“Communicated thoughts and feelings through visual representations...a variety of materials Literacy behaviours evident in the way they use language, images and materials to express and think critically about ideas and emotions as they listen and speak, view and represent ... (Curriculum p. 15)

Problem Solving and Innovating.

The project started with a prompt - a problem of sorts. “If you could do something to change the world, what would you do?” (Johanna’s question) They discussed their ideas at length, and explored with different art materials to determine the best medium to express their ideas.

What did this experience mean to Charlie?