

Connecting the Dots

Eldon Katter

We've been hearing a lot about connecting the dots recently. Pundits have pointed to repeated failure to connect the dots as a weakness in our national security. While it is doubtful that an education in art could have prevented someone from allowing a man with a bomb in his underpants to board an airplane, it is reasonable to believe that a better foundation in childhood art education might enable people to become more adept at connecting the dots. After all, the creative skills fostered in an art program include seeing relationships, making associations, recognizing patterns, staying focused on the big picture, and making judgments.

How Kids Make Connections

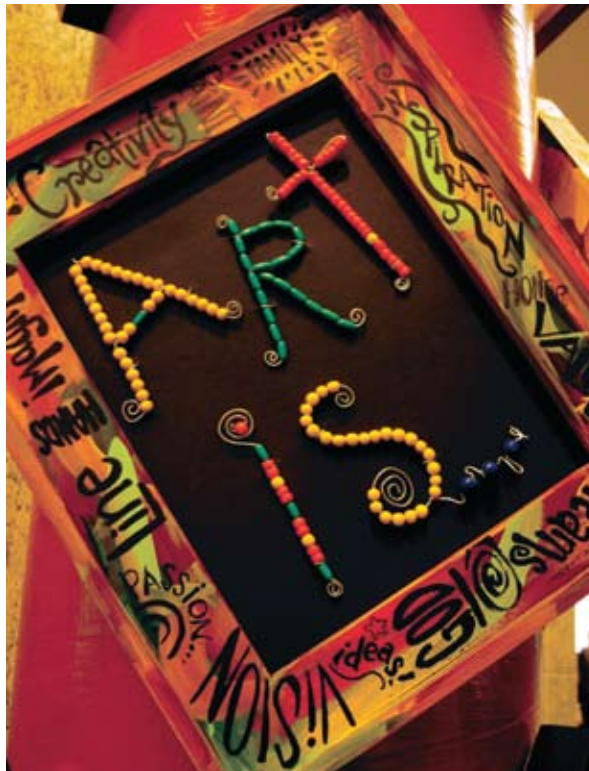
Making connections is what art is all about. Consider the following:

When artists make art, they visualize connections between ideas, materials, and processes. They explore possibilities, generate alternatives, and make choices.

When kids make art, they learn how to visualize those same connections.

When critics write about an artwork, they examine it closely and take note of every detail. They make connections by analyzing relationships among all the parts and interpret meaning through metaphor. When kids write about art, they have to think like detectives. They keep asking, "Is this good? Why or why not?"

When art historians explain why artworks look the way they do, they



Photograph by Nancy Walkup.

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make connections between time and place, traditions and innovations, and continuity and change. They look to the past. When kids investigate artworks and consider how, when, and where something was made, they make connections between their own immediate world and other times and places.

When aestheticians discuss the nature of art and beauty, they make distinctions and logical connections between assumptions, premises, and conclusions. They consider how values and feelings affect one's thinking when responding to art. When kids discuss when and why something might be considered art, they make connections by comparing facts and opinions.

How Teachers Can Make It Happen

So how do art teachers nurture creative skills and help students to connect the dots? Let's summarize.

In teaching children how to think more creatively and with greater concentration, art teachers can encourage constant practice of the following ten strategies in all art learning activities:

1. Be a keen observer. See the obvious and take in all the details and facts.
2. Broaden the scope of your vision. Explore alternatives and look at other things.
3. Look to the past and learn from it. Consider borrowing from or building on traditions.
4. Make comparisons and look for patterns, trends, and diversions.
5. Be open to the unexpected.

Allow yourself to think about something different. Try changing your point of view.

6. Allow your imagination to enter into the picture.
7. Ask lots of "what if" questions related to things such as: substitution, rearranging, reversing, exaggerating, or simplifying.
8. Always focus on the big picture.
9. Map your plans. Use relational webs. Consider combining ideas, but don't force connections.
10. Learn from your mistakes and keep asking, "Is this good? Is this the best I can do?"

Remember: Making connections is like solving a puzzle. Keep connecting the dots. 🌀

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