THE SKILL EXCHANGE:
A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY FOR CHILD SELF AWAKENING
THROUGH COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN ART EDUCATION

By

Brittany Lynn Ranew

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Approved:

______________________________________
MAJOR PROFESSOR

______________________________________
DATE
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The masters art education program at the University of Georgia has brought great richness to my professional and personal life thanks to the professors, colleagues, and mentors I proudly call friends. My gratitude extends to Katie Towns and the students of Oglethorpe County Primary School. They have affirmed my belief in the extraordinary ability of the young to teach many things, a notion I expect to witness again as a teacher. The education I have received over the past two years has guided me towards what I feel I am truly fitted to do and that brings me great happiness.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

A skill exchange is an educational structure for a classroom to strengthen the relationships of students with educators and each other as they better understand themselves. In this system, natural skills and abilities are drawn from the students by simply asking, “What are you very good at doing or making?” Personalities are brought into the classroom to advance learning in the context of one’s life.

The idea of a skill exchange was first brought to my attention in a graduate level art seminar composed of students from a variety of studio art backgrounds. Without prior preparation, the instructor asked each of us, a group of sixteen, to compile a list of our skills. Since there was a variety of arts-based skill represented in the class, every list was different. However, skills were not strictly related to art - cleaning expertise, party tricks, and unique talents were also present. We did not discover how these lists would function in the course until after they were collected and we had forgotten they existed. Two months later, the lists reappeared. We were paired with a peer from whom we were to learn a skill of our choosing and vice versa.

Participating in a skill exchange early in my graduate studies highly influenced the focus I was to take in my developing philosophies as an art educator. The idea that one’s unique talents, some seemingly very distant to academic relevance, could contribute to academic life was novel to me. While I am sure an educator along the way had asked me what I was good at doing or making, the notion that my abilities were valued had never been so explicitly clear. In the process of exchanging skill, much more was shared. Skill was the focus; however, there was also a sense of camaraderie that naturally occurred with the teamwork. Tools were shared and
trusted in the hands of a peer, and ideas, likes and dislikes were exchanged in a free academic environment. In a setting that at first seemed intimidating (after all, this was my first art class in five years), I was able to find my voice and vision with help from classmates.

I immediately contemplated how this system of exchange could benefit other students though. Specifically, how could I adapt this system for young art students?

Throughout my process to create such a system for children, I continued to explore how adults can participate, and benefit, from what came to be a skill exchange. In the summer of 2013, I worked with a group of fellow artists to organize an installation based on these ideas for a local art space in Athens, Georgia. Athens Institution for Contemporary Art (ATHICA) is a nonprofit organization which seeks out local artists to explore what art means in a contemporary sense. We called ourselves Tinker Lab Collective, and we called upon the community of Athens to share what they were able to teach as well as what they wished to learn. The installation collected submissions of both responses for a six week period.
Figure 1 & 2:

Skill Exchange Installation by Tinker Lab Collective, July 2013
The Tinker Lab Collective skill exchange culminated in a series of micro talks where three people from the community, experts in subjects other than their professional field, gave mini lessons on Chinese ink paintings, sewing by hand and machine, and how to design an effective business card. The submissions from the community guided us towards experts of interest. On a small scale, the installation showed that participants were interested in three aspects of a skill exchange. The aims that were met included: to engage and strengthen connections within the local community, to increase value of individuals within the community through acknowledgment of the public’s abilities, and to create interest in how one can gain knowledge from peers. If all of these aspects could benefit a group of adults, would it have the same positive effect on children?

With this applied project I have created a unit rooted in progressive educational ideals which aim to expose and value the natural abilities of young children in public education. The following is an account of all phases of development and implementation of this project. The first chapter begins with a personal anecdote on how I was introduced to the idea of a skill exchange. In the second chapter I examine past and current examples of systems in our culture that have a similar framework to the first grade Skill Exchange. Exemplar models look into how a system of free exchange of abilities can influence learning, teaching, and community development in an informal educational environment. A case study is also introduced to relate my intent of implementation of a skill exchange to public school curriculum. Chapter two directs attention to educational philosophies surrounding the developmental stages of students ages six and seven years old. First grade students’ cognitive and social development are of interest because, in the fall of 2013, eighteen students within this age group participated in the proposed skill exchange unit of instruction. Chapter three provides background information and detailed
lesson plans of the unit and chapter four gives more information about the teaching experience.
In conclusion there are field test reflections about the understanding I gained as an art educator.

It is my intent to impart to the reader the influences that have impacted my view of art
education’s role in a young student’s life. John Dewey (1934) has centered my understanding on
the fundamental importance of learning as it is seen through the ideals of progressive theories.
Elliot Eisner (2002) has also been highly influential; his understanding of how the arts function
in learning gives accurate expression to my thoughts when my words lack clarity. My
professional and personal ideals also connect to Maxine Greene (1988) in terms of how one
encounters freedom within various life experiences and how its presence (or absence) affects
education. Child developmental theorists Jean Piaget (1928) and Lev Vygotsky (1962) speak of
the work done by children with high respect. I hold similar feelings about the thoughts and views
of children and wish to convey a positive attitude towards the students with whom I work in a
spirited attempt to breakdown hierarchy of age in schools. Jacques Rancièr (1991) contributes
to my understanding of this hierarchy, and his reference will frame how I can influence a change.
The presence of happiness within education is also improtant in forming my teaching beliefs.
Nell Noddings (2003) informs my work by explaining how an educator can contribute to a
happier learning environment.

John Dewey (1916) suggests that, “to find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an
opportunity to do it is the key to happiness” (p.358). Education is, in fact, the process by which
we discover what we are best suited to do. Education is more than job preparation, however,
which Dewey implies by linking what we are “fitted to do” to our “happiness”. The process of
discovering ourselves, of finding our interests and strengths, is one that takes place in school as
well as out.
I sensed a void as I reflected upon my own early education. I was unable to link my reality outside of school to school life. They were separate worlds. The absence of a connection between them continued well into my adolescence. The benefits of seeing educational and personal life as one were not completely realized, for me, until entering higher education. I do not feel less successful because of this, nor do I feel that my early education was lacking, but I do believe it is essential for people to understand how all parts of their life contribute, aid, and benefit other parts in a holistic sense.

There is a place for personality, interests, family, and (perhaps most naturally) friendship in school. There should also be a felt connection between home life, community and school. To fully live the educational philosophy that John Dewey has simply defined (what one is fitted to do) is to aid in happiness. My goal is to make education a welcome part of a student’s early life. It is not a rite of passage, nor a step to gain access to the real world, but rather an enriching and fun life experience. How do we allow children the pleasure of experiencing education as a part of their real world? How do we bridge the divides between home, community and school?

Everyone, at any age, can benefit from acknowledgment of their abilities and in what way they may be able to contribute to a better way of life for themselves and others through those skills. Our life’s mission is to pinpoint these skills and use them in a way that brings purpose to our every day. I believe that our abilities are being overshadowed by seemingly greater objectives. These false priorities include framing success as financial growth and material possession. Of course, these are necessary, to some degree, for one to function in our society today. However, I suggest that we adjust our focus to experiences which give rise to unique skills in each of us. It is through these skills that our purpose roots us to our community and gives meaning to the presence of our full selves within that setting. I believe a skill exchange has the
potential to awaken young children to their own potential and the potential of their peers. This applied project seeks to discover how a group of young students can work towards finding what they are fitted to do through a progressive strategy in art education, and together, find happiness.
Chapter 2

The Skill Exchange and the First Grader

The field of art education is composed of ideas not confined to visual arts; theories we study draw from a range of philosophies in all areas of knowledge. This was a surprise to me upon entering this discipline. I assumed that all learning must relate directly to the field it belongs. Now I understand how pulling from different influences can only strengthen knowledge. There are many positive outcomes from this inclusivity. The focus of this applied project reflects my appreciation for interdisciplinary studies within art education. A blurring of boundaries between disciplines is most similar to the natural collaboration of disciplines as we experience them in life. Perhaps, if someone were to read the following project without a specialized area attached, they may have a hard time identifying it as a study in art education. This has caused doubt and uncertainty in my work. However, the fact that the origin of this educational strategy cannot be pinpointed is why I am attracted to art education. There is a freedom in the creative allowances of teaching art. Not having one answer to a question makes the subject matter adaptable for an educator and better able to adapt learning to meet the individual needs of each student.

A public art educator recently brought my attention to the fact that very few of her students would grow up to become artists or even regularly encounter the arts. Elliot Eisner (2002) supports the presence of art in education not because it prepares students for a life in the arts but because thinking, expression, and communication skills acquired through experiences in the arts are “treasured for their intrinsic value” (p.xii). In the same way, another prominent figure in art education advocacy did not view education as a mere preparation for life. Dewey (1916) believed that education is life itself. Public education, for the most part, adequately prepares
students for life. What I see lacking in our public education system is an acknowledgment that school life is reality. To offer students an approach to their educational experience as life experience, not preparation for life experience, is, I believe, the best manner to secure successful experiences for them in the future.

*What is a Skill Exchange?*

To make and to do are naturally learned in the home in the years leading up to a child’s formal education. Home is our first learning environment with an introduction to language and social experiences. The skills we learn at home should transfer directly to school. Dewey emphasized that education should create a “natural progression of learning from home life into early schooling” (Gradle, 2013, p.73). However, I question how accurately we can translate ourselves at home to who we are as a student. My traditional public education, though nurturing, lacked encouragement for students to create a sense of self. Sir Ken Robinson (2009) gives a voice to the notion that creativity and self-fulfillment must have a place in public education. He suggests that we take a critical look at how our school systems function today and how we can, specifically through the arts, “awaken students up to what they have inside themselves” (2010). A skill exchange has the potential to cultivate student interests within education to encourage self-awareness, build upon a sense of school as community, and help students attain happiness through learning.

The skill exchange was a novel idea to me when my instructor, Lola Brooks, introduced a project centered around peer instruction to our class. In fact, it was novel to her as well. This was the first attempt she had made in conducting such an exchange; it began as an interesting
experiment. The purpose of this applied project is to adapt an effective approach experienced in higher education to be used in an elementary school. This is my effort to fill the gap I experienced in early education. Before we concentrate on how and why a skill exchange would benefit a first grade classroom, it is important to learn more about how others have interpreted and utilized a system of free trade of abilities. While it was a novel idea to our graduate class, skill exchanges have been of interest to people the world over for many years.

*Origins: Past and Present Takes on Skill Sharing*

The earliest example of skill sharing in the United States comes from Colonial New England and has its roots in community development. The *bee*, a gathering of neighbors to aid one in need of help, is a term originating from the Anglo-Saxon word *bane*, meaning “to share” (Block, 2013). In craft, sewing bees may be the most familiar area in which this term is used. During which a community comes together to sew in a group in order to finish the job of one at a much faster pace. Barn raising, apple picking, and corn husking are other examples of bees that would take place whenever the need arose (Block, 2013). This system of favors works on a reciprocal basis, you help me and then when I need your help I can count on you. There is no exchange of money and, ideally, is an equal exchange of ability. This traditional sense of skill sharing, applied within and outside an art context, is an example of how community can benefit citizens living within a range of specialized skill.

*Time Banks*

In the United States, Edgar Cahn took advantage of the one-third of America’s economy which he stated was “off the radar” by establishing the first Time Bank in the mid-1980s
(Collom, Lasker, & Kyriacou, 2012). He realized that there was a portion of the work force whose skills were not being adequately recognized. Time Banks were a way to channel the energy people put into unpaid abilities (or skills not used in their professional field) for free. The time one gives in aid is recorded as hours in the “bank,” and when in need, one can request help from the community members whose skills are a part of the system. In this sense, modern time banks stray from the traditions of a bee. Whomever you give to does not have to be the person you receive help from, this allows freedom to ask and give help as the need arises (Collom, Lasker, & Kyriacou, 2012). The idea began to pick up in the late 2000s, as a reaction to the economic downturn when there was a heightened need of local support without monetary backing. Internet organization and communication ease contributed to the spread of such systems. Existing today, people who are a part of the contemporary “community currency movement” (Collom, Lasker, & Kyriacou, 2012, p.7) are able to access local skill resources in making connections to local people with a variety of skills and goods.

**Skill Exchange UK**

Skill Exchange UK is a business model that offers employees opportunities for professional development as well as providing companies a temporary work force (Weekes, 2013). Here, money is exchanged, but this example is worth mentioning in that it functions as a part of the economy within a culture, not as an alternative. Corporations use this model to network and create stronger bonds across industries. Skill Exchange UK is useful in this conversation because it exhibits the adaptability of the system. Professionally, ability sharing is effective in productivity and job security. Socially, it gives rise to collaboration among businesses that otherwise would not communicate. Though outside the field of art, this system of
exchange gives backing to the strength that interdisciplinary understanding can bring into multiple areas of how our modern society functions.

**Skill Exchange San Francisco**

Today, the public is more careful to shop and dine locally, and this phenomenon may explain why skill exchanges are becoming increasingly abundant. Of course, this trend meets the needs of local economies utilizing the resources within their borders. For many, it is more than that; these are community building opportunities on a number of levels. San Francisco has a prime example for how people can socially cultivate naturally arising local talents. *The Skill Exchange San Francisco*, established in 2011, “encourages self-reliance through social skill exchange” (Koepell, 2011). Koepell, a designer and creator of the project, establishes monthly gatherings where people in the community can drink, mingle and teach each other handmade skills, from food preparation to bike repair. This example, like all previous systems of exchange mentioned here, has an element of social interaction. Adults are like children in this way, as evidence from early child developmental psychologist will explain later, in that social experiences are fundamental to our ability to learn (Tryphon, A. & Vonèche, J. J., 1996).

**Peer Instruction in Public Education**

All of these skill sharing structures have been created by adults for adults and provide a place where people can share ideas, abilities, and social interactions. Throughout my research of such systems, there has been a group of individuals that has been excluded, children. There may be a number of reasons for this. In school, children are situated in a prime environment for sharing knowledge. That is the purpose of education: to relay information from one individual to
another. Another reason may be that children do not possess the wherewithal, or experience, to be able to offer a skill to exchange.

Yes, school is a place for sharing knowledge. There is one major difference, however: the knowledge in traditional education usually goes one way, from adult to child. Informal education is learning through experience without any set objective. A skill exchange falls into this category since it is a system where there is not one outcome and knowledge is in flux. It is unpredictable, the teacher and learner roles are in flux. Learning should not be a one way street within the classroom as much as it is not in the world outside of formal schooling. A skill exchange in a school could function as a system to acknowledge and allow knowledge to flow more naturally. Students would be able to share what they know with peers and instructors alike.

Yes, students do spend their day learning. However, the best way we all learn is when we are not conscious of it. One purpose, perhaps unintentionally, of a social skill exchange (like in San Francisco). Is that learning becomes something you choose to do because it is fun.

**Action Research: A Skill Exchange Case Study**

Action research is conducted by education professionals actively seeking ways to better their instruction. *Savoir ou connaître? Alternative ways of knowing in the foreign language class* (Strachan & Zoukis, 1992) is a case study that follows the research of one middle school teacher Evi Zoukis. Zoukis’s work sheds light on the benefits of peer instruction in a traditional school similar to the intentions of a skill exchange. While this study did not take place in an art classroom, the benefits of putting students in the role of instructor translate well.

Zoukis documented her account of an assignment that made students instructors (Strachan, & Zoukis, 1992). Each student planned a lesson to teach their peers about a skill of
their choosing from unique areas of expertise. Sounds easy, right? The lessons were to be taught in either French or Greek. How to make chocolate grasshoppers, instruction on calligraphy, music appreciation, and the fundamentals of sailing were the examples given in the teacher’s log. The action research revealed that students used “non-mechanical” language, and that student teachers challenged themselves and the student learners unintentionally. The lesson put learning into a practical, life-like setting, a method difficult to successfully create in a classroom. The students were not memorizing conjunctions in order to pass a test; they were learning how to communicate naturally.

The lesson did not come without its challenges. Zoukis states that it was difficult to influence student confidence; throughout the planning process there was resistance and frustration. As the observer, Zoukis was put in an interesting perspective as her students taught. Through their lessons, she was able to reevaluate her own methods and learned from student responses to student-led lessons. “... I noticed how the students both imitated and deviated from what I do in the classroom. What they did made me question my own practice. ... Many students devised creative ways to use the text and I thought the class seemed to be having more fun than when I do it” (1992, p. 58). Role reversal in the classroom not only helps students think in a different way but also provides a form of self-assessment for the teacher.

*The First Grader*

The skill exchange presented here is a concept of peer instruction and learning adapted for a first grade class. To better understand the educational setting of the field test conducted for this applied project, the scope of skill exchange relevance will focus on a specific age group. Children entering first grade are usually six years old. Most students will complete the course
work required and move to the second grade at the age of seven. Six and seven-year-old children are vastly different from middle, high, college and adult aged students. Age is a rather obvious difference, but what else makes one assume a young child cannot do what young adults and adults can accomplish? In the first grade, one learns to read, write, and understand the fundamentals of simple math. Along with academics, one is learning how to interact with his or her world as he or she collect experiences with the people and situations in that world. He or she is at the beginning of his or her academic life but also at the beginning of forming many other parts of him or herself. Friendships become more prominent at this age. Also in first grade, school responsibilities become more demanding. And, since one is able to communicate his or her thoughts and feelings, one is more accountable for behavior. While adolescence is a time of change and adjustments, primary school comes with its fair share of new situations.

The decision to work with a group of first-grade students had me thinking about all of these considerations. Some may believe that children this age are not able, nor willing, to conduct a skill exchange effectively. A participant in such an exchange is expected to articulate their skills, be able to communicate that skill to others, and, out of desire to learn from a peer, have the ability to acquire knowledge from another’s skill set. While youth can limit a child’s knowledge and ability I believe young children are very capable individuals. Participation in a skill exchange is beneficial for this population. First graders are new to the educational experience. If at the onset they are made aware of the role their abilities and interests play in their education, then they will be able to carry that awareness with them throughout their formal education. Also, while much is demanded of them, these students may not have enough opportunities in school to speak to and act out their own interests.
In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Jacques Rancière (1991) tells us that, “The ignorant person will learn by himself what the master doesn't know if the master believes he can and obliges him to realize his capacity” (p. 15). In other words, the instructor can use his or her knowledge to empower a student's belief of his or her intelligence. In emancipating the student, or making him or her “conscious of the true power of the human mind” (p.15), the teacher is enacting his or her ignorance in order to assert the student’s intelligence. This is in fact what Zoukis (Strachan, & Zoukis, 1992), the foreign language teacher/action researcher, acted upon in her class - students, when given a chance to show what they know by instructing others, were able to teach their teacher as well. It is in this way that the first grade class will be able to assert their intelligence through a skill exchange, where learning is not limited to peers and can, perhaps unintentionally, teach adults.

*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* also speaks to the hierarchical system early education exhibits (Ranciere, 1991). Zoukis (Strachan, & Zoukis, 1992) gave the responsibility of teaching to the students. In doing so, she has broken down traditional roles of teacher as giver of knowledge and handed that task to her students, who, in this tradition, are thought of as empty vessels to be filled. Ranciére suggests that the hierarchy of teacher over student is a “pedagogical myth” (1991, p.7). He suggests that the world of intelligence is severed; people are wrongly lumped into one of two categories, superior vs. inferior. “The former [inferior intelligence] registers perceptions by chance, retains them, interprets and repeats them empirically, within the closed circle of habit and need. This is the intelligence of the young child and the common man” (1991, p.7). Although this is a pedagogical critique, there may be truth in the thought process of the child and the common man. Like Ranciére, I do not believe in pure explication of a subject with a direct line from the teacher’s mind to the child’s. However, the words I wish to direct the
reader’s attention to in this quote are “habit and need.” If, in fact, the young learn by habit and need (closed circle or not) then perhaps we can adapt the teaching model to allow such learning. We can do this by first breaking down the barriers brought on by an antiquated one-way channel of knowledge and second by asking the students about their habits and needs, then we discover what they desire to learn.

**Dewey: Making and Doing**

John Dewey’s ideas of experiential learning are at the forefront of my thinking as I work toward a strategy to expose the skills of children (Gradle, 2013). The intentions of a skill exchange mimic the function of Dewey’s curriculum created for the alternative learning model of the Chicago Laboratory School. He prioritized the interests of the children by giving them more freedom to choose what they wished to learn, integrating the ages of children in one classroom, and by unbolting the desks. This last aim is a figurative and literal gesture for which he is well known. By offering students the opportunity to choose how they are educated, children will embrace learning. They will retain what they learn more effectively in a least restrictive environment. Criteria for curriculum within the Lab School included three main subjects: “doing and making,” “history and geography,” and “science” (p.73). Within these subjects was also an element of interdisciplinary learning, a paramount feature for progressive educational theories. At the turn of the century, radical changes of traditional education were not easily accepted. However, his work sought to create “the natural progression of learning from home life into early schooling” (p.73). Progressive ideology made sense to few then but can be influential to our modern public education, one hundred years since the Lab School began. I will explain further of how I propose we do so. For now, I believe it will be helpful to better understand a child’s
cognitive and social development from six to seven years old and how adults can aid young children in natural learning experiences.

**Piaget: Stages of Child Development**

For research on how to approach conversations with young children in relation to their cognitive understanding, I looked to the work of Jean Piaget (1928). He is noted for the developmental stages which made sense of seemingly “wrong” answers young children would give during cognitive tests (Tryphon, & Vonèche, 1996). The visual journals of students participating in the field test of the first grade skill exchange provide multiple examples of seemingly “wrong” answers. A number of children, including Ian, spell “drawing” as “jroling” (see figure 6). Yes, technically this is the wrong way to spell the intended word. However, the context in which these children are writing explains the mistake. Ian is learning to read and write in an area where phonetically the spoken word “drawing” is more like “jroling”. His developmental stage, as Piaget discovered, helps us to understand his manner of thinking. Instead of labeling child “wrong,” Piaget (1928) explains child logic in relation to five stages of cognitive development. From birth to two years, the child is in the sensorimotor stage; their world is known only through movements and sensations (think of a baby experiencing new objects by continually putting them in his/her mouth). For the purposes of this project, we will focus on the preoperational stage, that is, when a child makes sense of their world through visual language (visual journals will give many examples). This stage includes children ages two to seven years old. Next, children seven to eleven years old make up the concrete operational stage, when logic is used as they begin to consider concrete events (their jokes become more developed). Lastly, the formal operational stage includes children ages twelve and up. During
this final stage of child development, adolescents and young adults begin to have more abstract thoughts about reason and consider hypothetical situations (Piaget, 1928).

Regarding art education, the preoperational stage is interesting because it centers on how children make sense of their world through visual language, which leads them to better understand through reading and writing. Reading and writing are clearly important tasks to a first grader. This concept is reflected in the records of most student visual journals during the field test of the skill exchange lessons. These students’ worlds revolve around their growing ability to read and write. Art plays a large role in how these students access the realm of written language through drawings. Art is one way a child communicates about how they think about what they are doing. “What we see in children’s artwork is the progression of the development of such thinking” (Eisner, 2002, p.146). Visual journals, like those used in the skill exchange field test, reveal that drawings offer as much information about a child’s abilities as their written and verbal communication. Now we will delve deeper into understanding how students benefit from cognitive development in art education.

**Eisner: Invent Yourself**

Elliot Eisner, with a background as a painter, was an art educator whose work informs those in and out of education about the cognitive benefits of art in schools. With a nod to Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993), Eisner (2002) stressed the fact that we all have unique ways of learning. A major focus of the developmental stage these first graders are within is to “transform experience into its linguistic counterpart” (p.86). Eisner’s view on “situated learning” (p.86) goes right in line with that of Piaget and Vygotsky’s belief that learning requires a social interaction (2002, p.93). He afforded art education an advantage in
the sense that the field “…gives learning a social character; it departs from the more individual and often atomized conceptions of learning that have dominated much of educational philosophy” (p.93). Although Eisner speaks to all areas of the arts, visual arts learning can offer students social interactions in collaboration. Working together is not solely an action in the art classroom; teamwork is emphasized throughout school. However, the social action in visual arts collaboration requires a participant to reveal personal intent. This, I believe, is how the arts uniquely access and positively influence personal awakening in students. Aside from social development, there are complex and subtle advantages in the mind’s growth through the study of art (Eisner, 2010). The question is, as an educator, how does one accurately assess the growth of students?

**Piaget and Vygotsky: Interviewing Young Children**

Interviewing approaches were also a concern of Piaget; he believed that an adult interviewer should not speak down to their subject. Doing so would mean the educator succumbs to the hierarchy innate in most adult to child interactions. Rather, a “free-wheeling” approach, which Piaget terms “free conversations,” is a more successful and relaxed technique which overcomes this prejudice (Tryphon & Vonèche, 1996, p.3). I applied this manner of discussion with the children who participated in the field test. Below is an excerpt from a conversational interview conducted with Carolina, one of the most confidant speakers, about her ability to draw three-dimensional squares.

Carolina: I’m good at making three-d squares.
Brittany: You are good at that, and who did you teach?
C: Everybody at my table.
B: Now how many people is that?
C: Five.
B: Five people?! Was it hard to teach five people how to do that?
C: No, might have been hard for them but it wasn’t too hard for me. I tried to teach Penelope but she would not listen.
B: Why not?
C: I don’t know. You gotta try to make ‘em kinda the same size or it’ll will look weird.
B: So hers weren’t looking…
C: Right.
B: …not weird. Haha.
C: Haha.

Casual conversations with children, like in this example, are natural for me, but doing so consciously had an obvious positive effect. Students were much more willing to partake in an interview if it was “free.” When interview questions were asked one after another the only response generated were blank stares from children who I had been carrying on a free conversation with just moments before the interview began. When a child shuts down it is a sign that what is begin required of them is too challenging, it is above their Zone of Proximal Development (Zo-Ped). Each individual has a unique Zone of Proximal Development according to where they are situated within a learning spectrum (Vygotsky, 1962). When not met it is the educator’s responsibility to accommodate to the learner’s needs. In this case, another interviewing approach was the accommodation, with use of a gerund sentence structure children are better able to deliver information through relation to a similar individual. The origins and use of both concepts, Zo-Ped and the use of the gerund, will now be discussed in more depth.

Alongside Piaget’s approaches to child development, I referenced Vygotskian strategies to further expose the thoughts of the first grade subjects. Lev Vygotsky (1962) devoted his studies to the understanding of how adults can aid in a child’s learning and cognitive development (Tryphon & Vonèche, 1996). Social interactions are a vital component to successful mental growth, according to this midcentury child psychologist (Vygotsky, 1962). Piaget suggests a number of important strategies in talking to young children. One method for interviews uses a gerund sentence structure to allow students a basis of answering a question in
their own words, instead of a simple yes or no reply. For example, “I know a boy. His name is Francois. You know, in the evening, while eating, Francois watches television. Does that sometimes happen to you?” (Tryphon & Vonèche, 1996, p.176). This method does not lead the child to an answer, therefore the reply is a more accurate indicator of their understanding. Such techniques were used in assessment after the skill exchange was conducted (see Appendix for interview transcripts).

**Vygotsky: Zone of Proximal Development**

Vygotsky (1962) is best known for this theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. In this theory, it is expected that adult or advanced peer interactions can accelerate the cognitive development of a child faster than if a child were to work alone. According to Vygotsky Zo-ped is the area between a child’s actual development (where they find themselves today) and their potential development. Little attention has been paid to this space, even though the area between is the most accurate point of a child’s actual state of cognitive development (Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984).

Vygotsky postulated that education should be a place where instruction is geared towards the direction of development. His pedagogical work suggests that schools should be a place where students are awakened to their potential, not judged on what they have already accomplished (Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984). Vygotsky took into consideration the future development of the child during a time when most were concentrating on a child’s past to determine what they should learn next. This is key in Constructivist beliefs of how we attain knowledge, in which instead of miraculous intelligence, or being born with innate knowledge, we begin with a blank slate. From the beginning, we are retaining information to build a
foundation. More is added (or constructed) in phases according to our experiences in learning. Piaget and Vygotsky are self-proclaimed Constructivists, believing that all knowledge builds upon what has been learned previously (Tryphon, A. & Vonèche, J. J., 1996).

Vygotsky believed we need others to encourage our cognitive growth. He criticized standardized tests that were based upon the work of a child’s understanding alone. An educator can apply these theories by aiding in learning (scaffolding). Adult and accelerated peer interactions contribute to cognitive development and should not be discounted. Eisner (2002) further explains that a good educator will adapt the curriculum for each student to stay in their individual Zone of Proximal Development. The work will not be too easy (interest would be lost), but it cannot be too hard either (which would cause frustration). The work must be just within the area that will build upon what the student already knows and keep the future learning in view to whichever direction their development is heading (Eisner, 2002). In this applied project, students were highly supported through both adult and peer interaction. The purpose of all activities weas to awaken students to the success that can be achieved by seeking help outside of their own understanding, essentially, by accessing the Zone of Proximal Development.

Cognitive development is one type of learning. However, first graders grow in a number of ways. Piaget (1928) looked to the social development of children in his research. To learn children rely on peers almost as much as adult instructors. In the skill exchange students constantly referenced peers that they had helped or that had helped them. It is here that he discusses the egocentric behavior of children within the preoperational stage, two to seven year olds. Egocentricism, not to be taken as negative in this sense, restricts the perspectives a child can understand at this age. Their own perspective is the only one that matters because that is the only one of which they are aware. Lessons in empathy may aid students in their understanding of
outside perspectives. Another important aspect of a skill exchange is the encouragement of empathy. As Collom, Lasker, and Kyriacou (2012) suggest through their research on America’s voluntary systems of skill exchanges, one of the main elements for Time Banks’ long run success is their mission of respect. Everyone matters and has something to offer to their environment. The freedoms found in an art education classroom foster empathy. Through art exploration children are able to not only identify with peers, but also with cultural diversity, multiple age ranges and objects. In these ways, art education is the perfect point of entry for a skill exchange in a school.

**Greene: Daily Consciousness**

It has been my previous understanding that a teacher may interfere with a child’s education. Is it best for a student to create and take part in their learning independent from outside influence? Yet the instructors are important and play a vital role to learning. How does Maxine Greene’s (1988) description of the liberated teacher compare to Ranceire’s (1991) authoritarian, all-knowing instructor? Greene, a progressive educational theorist inspired by Dewey’s ideas, states that “…a teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own. It will be argued as well that children who have been provoked to reach beyond themselves, to wonder, to imagine, to pose their own questions are the ones most likely to learn to learn” (1988, p.14). “Wide-awakedness” describes the way in which humans should see the world, to bring consciousness to the everyday (Greene, 1988). To enact this freedom and wide openness in one’s self invites others to do the same. A teacher actively seeking knowledge to bring out the capabilities of their students will model a freedom for students to apply in their lives.
Progressive ideals of how education should function for children highlight play and experimentation in a classroom. John Dewey (1938) suggests the best form of education is experiential. The Chicago Laboratory School embodies his philosophy as children learn using their curiosity as a guide. A key difference in his methods of educating and those implemented in public education is an emphasis on student freedom. Without this fundamental quality in the classroom, teachers are unable to learn who their students are or their real nature. I believe there is a place for these progressive ideals in public education. A skill exchange could work towards education as experience through the interactions of one student passing along knowledge in their own manner and language through play and experimentation.

**Mirror Neurons**

Empirical evidence confirms ideas of art education stimulating cognition through the examination of mirror neurons (Jeffers, 2009). With the discovery of mirror neurons, scientists are able to understand how learning by watching is not only effective for visual but also physical intelligences. Someone witnessing a movement, such as a person picking up a pencil, activates the same part of the brain that would be active if the one observing were the one holding the pencil. This is true for children as young as three years old. Therefore, humans are able to experience others’ actions as if they were their own. The same applies to empathy; it is the identification of the self as someone, or something, else. The studies of mirror neurons go on to reveal that these cells are not only activated when we observe a gesture but also when we imagine one. This is one example of interdisciplinary collaboration. Neuroscience explains the benefits of artistic activities like classroom demonstrations as effective learning tools. This also is an example of how art engages cognitive development with the mind and body. These
embodied experiences are unique to curriculum in art education and, unfortunately, rare in formal education where most students are confined to desks.

**Community Wellness in Education**

Previously, I mentioned how intelligence can be seemingly divided into superior and inferior, according to Jacques Rancière (1991). In this frame of thought, which Rancière deems problematic, he defines superior intelligence as someone who “knows things by reason, proceeds by method, from the simple to the complex, from the part to the whole” (p.7). If this is true, then intelligent people understand how each part works within a complex function. To convey this thought of intelligence, education should live by a holistic view of our world.

We all are parts of a whole. This should be most true in an educational system, where students, teachers, principals, and administrators create a unified environment of learning. As sections of our lives become increasingly specialized so do they become divided. It seems that science does not mix well with the arts and math is separate from literature. A school exhibits a cultural tendency to keep disciplines in their own special area rather than experiencing them as a whole. It is at the earliest educational stage, where people of all “specialties” must work together to encourage a change in this paradigm.

A holistic paradigm correctly utilizes each part. Capra (1996) identifies a new view of seeing how we fit in, a shift in thinking for not only a neighborhood, city, or country but for the world as a holistic environment. Each person is not disconnected but “...embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature” (p.6). Let us pay more attention to the holistic advantages of learning. If many parts work collaboratively, the result manifests in extraordinary actions (Segne, 1990). The establishment of a skill sharing system in an
elementary school would be meaningful in an educational setting because it could foster a community of communal learning, where young children become the teachers. By elevating the role of the student, we can elevate the position of the class in the school and of the school in the wider community. The benefits of making a student the teacher that can be found in existing community programs (Collom, Lasker and Kyriacou, 2012), educational research (Strachan, & Zoukis, 1992), philosophies (Ranciére,1991) and neuroscience (Jeffers, 2009). A skill exchange can be established as an informal educational tool in a formal setting to enforce a holistic manner of living.

Happiness in Education

The key to happiness is to find what we are meant to do with our lives, as Dewey (1916) saw it. Nell Noddings (2003) values the presence of happiness in school. The very thought that school does not come with a great deal of happiness is discouraging. However, there is a high potential to change this. Children are assumed to be “innocent” and in a time of “undiluted happiness” (Noddings, p.29). These traits are stereotypes. In hand with cognitive and social development should be a concern for “perpetration for personal life” (p.28), according to Noddings. To achieve this in the classroom, Noddings suggests the educator “…stretch the standard curriculum so that it includes the interests of all children and not just a few” (p.39).

Happiness does not have one definition. Happiness is as unique as the individual who decides how to find happiness in his or her life. Again, the function of a skill exchange embodies the necessary elements to foster a learning environment where individual interests and knowledge are elevated. The classroom community is then more valuable, and all of the natural elements of
a group of people are utilized in a holistic manner. In a classroom, I believe, this can only result in the acquisition of happiness.
Chapter 3

*Proposed Unit of Instruction: The Skill Exchange*

In order to foster an acknowledgment of one’s skills and the skills of peers, I wished to apply the idea of a skill exchange as close as possible to the beginning of a formal educational experience. Developmentally, Piaget (1928) tells us that children ages six to seven years old are egocentric. The intent of the skill exchange is to have people build their self-worth in their own minds. Simultaneously, by participating in this unit, students will be able to understand the worth of learning within their cohort and the value of gaining understanding on a basis of exchange.

I was privileged to work with a group of six to seven year olds. “Kids,” “youngsters,” or even as specific as “first graders,” are terms frequently used as labels of inferiority. In my time with Katie Towns’s class, I built relationships with each individual, including Ms. Towns. As I began to learn more about them, I came to see that I related to them more as people than as an adult relating to a child (or as a student relating to a mentor in the relationship between myself and Ms. Towns). This made me question my own assumptions of people younger than me. Like all prejudice, previous assumptions break down as you learn about the individuals with unique personalities and traits. I was applying preconceived notions to this age group. To appease this, I will refer to each individual as just that, a unique individual. All reference to age will be to better understand their stage in development, not to lump them into a category that will not properly identify their true nature.

The field test for the skill exchange Unit was conducted in the fall semester of 2013. The unit is composed of five lessons spanning over five weeks. One lesson was conducted each day for one hour on Monday mornings. The lesson, though specifically created for an art classroom, has been adapted to function alongside core classroom curriculum in the elementary setting.
Instruction with this group of students began early in the school year when relationships with the teacher and classmates were first being established. The students were also getting to know me, the guest instructor, and therefore were warming up to new terms, techniques and the educational style that I brought into their school.

Oglethorpe County Primary school sits in a rural part of northeast Georgia. The school is made up of pre-kindergarten through second grade classes with 566 students. The student body is made up of 70% White, 17% Black, 7% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 5% Multiracial. 59% of the student body are eligible for free or reduced lunch and 48% come from economically disadvantaged homes (OCPS, 2013). All students come from the surrounding area, an economy greatly composed of farms and agricultural businesses. The school follows a rigorous standards-based education. In all accounts mentioned from the field test, student names have been changed to pseudonyms.

Katie Towns’s first grade class is specifically made up of eighteen students, eight male and ten female. The class represents students from diverse backgrounds, one third of the class speaks English as their second language and attend small group tutoring sessions multiple times a week away from the regular classroom. There is a range of learning ability as well, although no specific accommodations were required when these lessons were conducted. All students communicate well and are reading and writing at the level appropriate for their age. All students participate in an art lesson with an art educator once a week for forty-five minutes. The classroom teacher, Ms. Towns, places a high value on interdisciplinary learning and incorporates all subjects into her curriculum as long as their presence meet students’ interest and influences mental and personal growth.
Ms. Towns has taught in Oglethorpe County for five years. The reputation which precedes her is praiseworthy, and throughout the time I spent working with her, I discovered why. Upon walking into her class one sees four groupings of desks, surrounding a central area with a smart board overlooking a rug made up of rows of colorful squares. The overall feeling of the classroom is inviting with a sense of productivity; there is also a strong bond evident between the students and the teacher.

The great challenge is knowing how to teach. The what and why are easily accessible. For me, these pieces of pulling a lesson together feel natural as I draw equally from instinct and experience. However, the action of teaching (the how) is difficult. To appease this difficulty, I find inspiration in approaching teaching as an art form instead of a job. The passion for creating works of art, although challenging, is never impossible and, by applying this approach to teaching, I am a better educator. However, even with preparedness and passion, how can one ensure learning? Entering a new classroom with a great understanding of what and why to teach a lesson may be the only way to begin. The following collection of lessons is a place where teaching philosophies merge with theory and practice.
**The Skill Exchange Unit**

Instructor: Brittany Ranew  
School: Oglethorpe County Primary School  
Classroom Teacher: Katie Towns  
Number of Students: 18

**Day 1: Meeting a Handmade Art Object**

Unit Title: The Skill Exchange  
Grade Level: 1st  
Lesson: 1/5

**BIG IDEA:** Through the examination of handmade art objects students will gain conscious thinking (Greene, 1988) to apply to their own learning and teaching of abilities. This unit serves to create an environment of learning in the classroom where students explore the skills of artists, peers and themselves.

**I. BIG (LESSON) IDEA:** Close contact with a handmade art object, of personal significance to the instructor, will evoke curiosity to tell the story of the art piece.

**II. LESSON RATIONALE**

“A teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own.”

Maxine Greene (1988, p.14)

As a student myself, it has become increasingly clear that success comes when guided by personal interest. My interest in handmade objects is the starting point in the development of this lesson. I will use a handmade art object, of personal significance, to introduce myself to the class and to open a conversation about what handmade means. My grandmother’s crocheted lace will
be passed around the room for students to examine and hold. To further spark the students’ curiosity of the object, we will begin to draw out the story from the observations students make about the details they notice. Through interpretive play, a technique used in galleries by museum educators (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011), students will build a story about the art object based on their experience with the art piece. Questions about the history of the object, and its relation to me, will be answered as they occur to the students. By sharing a lesson rooted in my personal interests, I hope to communicate the importance of the presence of one’s personality in learning.

III. LEARNER OUTCOMES

Group experiences with handmade objects will influence consciousness and provoke deeper thoughts about everydayness (Greene, 1988). When students acknowledge what goes into creating objects, they will interact with inanimate objects, hand and machine made, with a higher sense of understanding. Students will also think critically about their own process of creating art.

IV. MATERIALS NEEDED FOR LESSON

A. Teacher Materials

- Handmade object (of personal significance to the instructor), field journal

B. Student Materials

- Visual journals (supplied by instructor), pencil

V. ENDING THE LESSON

The conversation sparked by the hands-on experience with a handmade art object should be led, though not forced, to begin a discussion about how the object was made, with what materials, with what tools and by whom. From here students are asked if they have any handmade art objects at home. If so, the following questions will guide the conversation. Do you
know who made it? How was it made? What was used to make it? Where is the object kept in your house? Does it belong to you or another person? Is there an object that is special to you?

Day 2: (Heritage Day) Meeting Makers and Doers

Unit Title: The Skill Exchange
Grade Level: 1st
Lesson: 2/5

I. BIG (LESSON) IDEA:

Close contact with handmade art objects would spark a conversation that will reveal personal interests of students and peers. Students will meet specialists of a variety of talents. As a class, students are free to ask these individuals about their making and doing.

II. LESSON RATIONALE

Visitors have come to the school to share with students different skills they use to make or do a specific task. During this yearly event, experts visit the school to inform students about their expertise. These may include a bee keeper, cook, soap maker, local history buff, blacksmith, Civil War re-enactor, dairy farmer, cow girl, and agriculturalist. Each participant of Heritage Day will have tools and demonstrate their skill for the class. In small group discussions, the class will identify skills the maker needed to make the art object/do their job. All observations will be recorded in sketch books through drawings and notes.

III. MATERIALS NEEDED FOR LESSON

A. Teacher Materials

-field journal

B. Student Materials

-handmade art object (or some representation, photo or drawing), visual journal, pencil
IV. ENDING THE LESSON

The end of the discussion will be guided towards the skills and/or talents that were required to make these objects. Are these objects art? How do you think the artists knew how to create these objects? Where did they learn how to make them? Did they make them in school? Why did they make them? Where did they get the supplies? Would you be able to make something like this? How would you make it? Where would you get the supplies? Who would teach you? Could you teach someone how to make something?

Day 3: Skill Lists

Unit Title: The Skill Exchange
Grade Level: 1st
Lesson: 3/5

I. BIG (LESSON) IDEA:

Students will answer the question, ‘What are you really good at doing or making?’ in written and visual depictions.

II. LESSON RATIONALE

“The impulse to draw is as natural as the impulse to talk.”

Kimon Nicolaides (1941, p. xiii)

Students will conduct individual work in their sketchbooks while communicating with their peers, their classroom teacher, and myself. All skills, of each child’s personal expertise, will be acceptable (they do not necessarily have to be artistic skills). Frequently, it is difficult to compile a list of one’s skills on command. Verbal sharing of ideas, observations and doodles will help to break down thought blocks.
Students will compile their skills in drawings and/or written notes. From these, with the help of each student and the classroom teacher, I will generate individual skill lists for each student.

If students are having a difficult time identifying skills they have, the class can work as a whole to create a picture of what their classroom teacher is “really good at doing or making”. Brainstorming about their teacher’s skills and seeing an example of a skill drawing, and how each will be different, students will be able to draw upon their own talents better.

III. MATERIALS NEEDED FOR LESSON

A. Teacher Materials
   - field journal

B. Student Materials
   - visual journals, pencils, markers, crayons

IV. ENDING THE LESSON

Students are told that the lists will be used to make pairs for the following lesson. With their partner’s list, they will choose one skill they desire to learn and their partner will do the same. From these learned skills, each student will create a handmade art object of their own.
Day 4: The Skill Exchange, Choosing a Skill to Learn

Unit Title: The Skill Exchange
Grade Level: 1st
Lesson: 4/5

I. BIG (LESSON) IDEA: Student groups will choose what skill they wish to learn from their partner and plan a mini-lesson. Students will be able to identify what they are able to contribute to a learning environment. In this environment, they will develop communication and listening skills as they teach and learn from a peer.

II. LESSON RATIONALE

Students will exchange journals and study the skills of a peer. All the notes and drawings up to this point have either been in pen or pencil. Students, once deciding upon a skill they wish to learn, will color in the page in their classmate’s journal. This exercise will communicate the act of sharing. In giving one’s journal and trusting the other to treat that work and knowledge with care is a symbolic action of what the skill exchange aims to do. In opening one’s journal for view by a peer the student is welcoming input and suggestions.

Once the students have chosen, and added color to the skill they wish to learn, planning begins. Students will begin to think critically about how one teaches and will create a lesson. During the next lesson they will teach their partner a skill. They will also be learning a skill of their choosing from their partner.

III. MATERIALS NEEDED FOR LESSON

A. Teacher Materials

- field journal, camera

B. Student Materials
sketchbooks, skill drawings, skill list (compiled for each child by the instructor with help of classroom teacher)

IV. ENDING THE LESSON

Before finishing the lesson, all materials lists are collected. Students are reminded that they will teach their partner a skill the following week. (Two days may be required for the skill exchange, this can be adjusted once the classroom teacher and I are aware of what the students are to teach and desire to learn.)

Day 5: The Skill Exchange, Peer Instruction

Unit Title: The Skill Exchange
Grade Level: 1st
Lesson: 5/5

I. BIG (LESSON) IDEA:

Young students will be given the chance to teach a skill of their own expertise. In exchange, they will learn a skill of their choosing from a peer. Individualized peer instruction will allow the classroom teacher and myself to give one-on-one aid and observe how the students teach one another.

II. LESSON RATIONALE

“We learn best when nobody is teaching us.”

Gustavo Esteva (2007, p.1)

Peer instruction will offer students a different, perhaps more natural, way to learn. Having a peer instructor means that the lesson will be taught by a person who has the most genuine understanding of his or her perspective. The language a peer uses is more similar than
how an adult communicates with a younger person. Similar developmental stages will aid in easy communication as the skill levels are paired more appropriately when a peer teaches someone within their cohort.

Each student will take on the responsibility of teaching a specialized skill to their partner. Once the lesson is complete, students will alternate roles and the peer teacher will become the student. The adult instructors will aid in the individual lessons only when asked; otherwise the students are free to teach, and learn, without interference from adults.

III. MATERIALS NEEDED FOR LESSON

A. Teacher Materials

-field journal, camera, voice recorder

B. Student Materials

-Sketchbooks, skill lists, lesson plans, materials list, tools needed for peer instruction (if needed)

IV. ENDING THE LESSON

Extra time may be required for this day depending on the skills each student teaches. In this case, the instructor and classroom teacher can adjust the schedule. If an extra day of peer instruction is not needed, then students will clean their area after the lessons are complete.

Follow up lesson, to be conducted three months after the initial skill exchange. Ask students to compile a list of their skills without looking at their original list. How do they compare? What do they remember about teaching their skill? How does teaching it change how they think of it?
Chapter 4

Field Test of Skill Exchange Unit

The best moments as an educator are when you realize that what you say and teach has been heard. Evidence of learning, and evidence of a teacher’s influence, will always strike a feeling of awe. Moments like this, when they surface without being prompted, are of even higher value. Weeks after finishing the skill exchange with the first grade class, I received this email:

Ms Brittany,
I am good at flipping. I told Thuong how to flip on the swing.

Marigold

Marigold’s email is a message describing her skill; she is good at flipping on the swing (while the swing is at rest). Next, she states that she taught a classmate to do this skill while they were on the playground. This exchange of skills took place during recess, when there was no formal learning agenda and students were free to choose how to spend their time. This account exhibits two truths. First, children are constantly instructing each other by formal and informal means. Second, Marigold and Thuy Thuong’s shared experience is evidence that she has been able to apply (outside of the classroom) what has been taught (inside the classroom). In this way both students express freedom: Marigold by acknowledging her ability to teach something worthwhile and Thuy Thuong by seeking out what he desires to learn from a more capable peer.

The skill exchange began with the students examining handmade lace created by my Grandmother. From their interactions with the art object, students created an understanding of how the object was made. All students, in handling the art object, were careful and contemplative. The discussion focused on how it was made, who made it, what tools were needed to make it and how the artist learned the skill required to make the art object. The first lesson was an introduction to a new instructor. I was able to share with them a piece of my
family history, and they, hopefully, were able to make a connection to the story discovered through the art object and its significance to myself. Students were also given the chance to experience a handmade craft firsthand. Through this experience they were able to analyze the skill and tools needed to make the object. The conversation then led to the artist who made the object and how that person acquired the skill to create lace. Where did they learn how to make lace? Following this lesson students were asked what they were able to do or make. This is a difficult question to answer and, therefore, was asked many times throughout the progression of the skill exchange.

In exploring the lives of artists, and what they do or make, students are able to touch on what natural abilities they possess. The arts are a springboard for this understanding because they are a familiar subject to students. During the second lesson local makers and doers were explored further through the school wide participation of Heritage Day, an annual event conducted every fall. Adults, ranging in ages and abilities, talked with students about a variety of artistic, historical, and economical characteristics present in the local area in which the school is situated. These included raising livestock, storytelling from Civil War re-enactors and metal smithing. This event offered valuable opportunities for students to interact with adults who make and do in a variety of ways within the local community.
Figure 3

Derrick’s reflection on metal smithing, “I like the man [who] makes the metal fire.”

Figure 4

Marigold’s Heritage Day reflection, her favorite was the livestock.
To begin the third lesson, students recorded thoughts about the people they met on Heritage Day, and what that person does or makes. Promptly after this activity, students were asked to record their skills. Each wrote sentences or drew in their visual journals responses to the question, “What are you really good at making or doing?” Here are some examples from the first skills lists of the students:

![Image of a child's drawing showing symbols and numbers]

**Figure 5**

*Valerie uses only symbols and images to record her skills*
Ian’s skill list is predominately of words. “I am good at drawing cars and horses and writing and making sandcastles and I can make a volcano.”

Mallory uses both images and words to express her skills. “I can make a flower.”
Students were free to record in their journals however they wished - some used all images (figure 5), some used only words (figure 6), and others used both (figure 7). How each student recorded their skills varied just as the types of skills they chose to record.

Once students compiled their skills lists, the following lesson allowed their peers to take a look at classmate’s visual journal and choose a skill to learn. In order to distinguish which skills were chosen, the student learner colored the ability the student teacher was to instruct. For example, Penelope’s journal had a number of skills that her classmate wished to learn.

![Figure 8](image1.png)  ![Figure 9](image2.png)

**Figure 8**  **Figure 9**

*Color coding for the skills a peer desires to learn from Penelope.*

“(1) I am good at making necklaces out of play dough like bracelets and necklaces; (2) I can read a book; (3) I can make a pigeon; (4) I can run fast, (5) I can slide on a slide so good at the playground.”
From the onset of this project, I have been skeptical of my ability to keep an artistic focus in my instruction with the skill exchange. Visual journals capture a young students need to communicate through words, symbols and imagery. Developmentally, these drawings which aid in the understanding of phonetic spelling, exhibit how one learns to communicate.

The skill exchange began with this first grade class in October of 2013. The lessons were conducted for five weeks; three months later the discussion began again about what the students were good at making and doing. There were major changes to the dynamic of the class from the time the skill exchange began to the follow up in March of 2014. A few students left, some were frequently absent due to illness, a new student arrived and a surprising number of snow days eliminated almost two weeks of learning content. However, these changes did not affect the function of the class; all students had made steady improvements on both their reading and writing ability. Bonds between students and their teacher were notably stronger, and students were more at ease with me, the guest instructor, after establishing a weekly presence.

An intentional period of time passed before assessing the effects of the skill exchange on the students of Ms. Towns’s class. The skills the students so dutifully surfaced throughout the unit lessons needed time to settle before asking them again, “What are you good at doing and making?” Ms. Towns had taken what I had taught and reiterated the importance of helping each other when it is needed. Every time they would see me, even after the skill exchange had run its course, they would begin to talk about the skills they had. In the spring of 2014, the students were asked again what they were good at doing and making. They recorded these thoughts in their visual journals without referencing the skills they had recorded earlier in the school year.
Applying the Interview Strategies of Piaget and Vygotsky

Interviews took place five weeks after the skill exchange field test. All interviews were recorded on school grounds. The following is an excerpt with an interview with Carolina, a seven year old with an impressive ability to talk. Conversations with Carolina occur easily and she is usually the first person to raise her hand in class to answer a question.

Brittany: So, Miss Carolina, I just wanted to ask you about the skills that we have talked about in class, the things that you are really good at, um…
Carolina: Uh huh, doing.
B: Making and doing. So, do you enjoy thinking about that, thinking about the things you’re good at making and doing?
C: Mu-hum.
B: Is it easy for you?
C: It’s kinda hard.
B: What’s hard about it?
C: Like, it’s hard to like, write it kinda. Like when I’m doing it it’s hard to think about it sometimes. Sometimes I just write all I need and I forget about what I was going to write.
B: How do you think I could make that easier? Did it help to draw pictures with your writing? Did that help?
C: Nod.
B: And does it help to talk about what you’re good at making and doing with a friend?
C: I’m good at making three-d squares.
B: You are good at that, and who did you teach?
C: Everybody at my table.
B: Now how many people is that?
C: Five.
B: Five people?! Was it hard to teach five people how to do that?
C: No, might have been hard for them but it wasn’t too hard for me. I tried to teach Kim but she would not listen.
B: Why not?
C: I don’t know. You gotta try to make ‘em kinda the same size or it will look weird.
B: So hers weren’t looking…
C: Right.
B: …not weird. Haha.
C: Haha.
Many of the students from the field test of the skill exchange were not as willing to have a relaxed conversation with an adult. Their body language told me they were uncomfortable and this affected their spoken and thought clarity. All precautions were made to make students feel as comfortable as possible.

To best engage their thoughts on the skill exchange, students were given examples of hypothetical situations based on people participating in an exchange of abilities, peer instruction and helping in a classroom setting. Three gerund examples, modeled after Piaget’s examples, were developed for the field test interviews.

(I) There is this boy I know, his name is John, and he is about your age. You know, sometimes, when he is at school, John likes helping his classmates at school. Does that ever happen to you?

(II) I have a friend, her name is Nicole, she is in first grade. Sometimes, when Nicole is in class, she tells me she is not good at doing anything. Do you have friends that say things like that? What can I do to help Nicole discover what she is good at doing or making?

(III) I know a little girl, her name is Victoria, she is six years old and she is always asking people to teach her things. Do you ever learn things from people?

Liberties were made to accurately portray similar situations to those experienced in the classroom. There were students who were less responsive during “free conversations.” If this was the case, the gerund strategy successfully triggered interest and, therefore, thought. Here is an example of an interview with Ricky. Ricky, speaks English as a second language very well. Ricky is fluent and fully capable of communicating with his instructors and peers. Here you will see his automatic connection with the rhetorical boy, John.

Brittany:…So there’s another person I know. A little boy that’s about your age and he…
Ricky: Is he seven?
B: He’s seven years old, yeah, his name is John. And he, well, when he’s at school he, um, helps his classmates with things. Do you ever help your classmates when you’re at school?
R: Nods.
B: How, what do you do to help them?
R: Um, Thuy Thuong, I help him with morning work.
B: With morning work?
R: Um hum, and, um… I don’t know, I help with things.

Four interviews were conducted in all, each reflected the work in each student’s visual journal. I believe that this is an indicator of the students bringing the truest version of themselves to the project. The classroom students were a strong cohort, supporting and aiding each other at every step. When someone was unable to think of a skill, they had a peer who would be able to help them acknowledge what that person was good at making or doing. In each interview, there was a mention of a classmate. This reference also exhibits the relation the students have to the close knit community created in a primary school classroom.

What I Learned

It is a privilege to work with a classroom teacher during an art lesson. Teachers who value all disciplines and make each known in all things taught give their students a relevance to learning that will benefit them throughout their education. Elementary and primary public schools give their students the advantage of familiarity with a core group of peers throughout the year. Their cohort works together from August to May with the same instructor. This is a prime setting to create strong teacher and student relationships which contribute to the sense of community found in a school.

To enter a middle or high school is to encounter a different sense of community altogether. Older student populations in public school systems provide a more challenging environment to build upon a sense of community because of the fluctuation of student cohorts
and teachers. Students are rarely with the same teacher or group of classmates longer than an hour period. Because of this, the student body is severed from a very important aspect of feeling like an essential part of a group of people.

A primary school is an appropriate setting for this project because of the natural sense of community developed from an intimate classroom group. However, a system to encourage community development, like a skill exchange, can greatly benefit younger and older students alike. Whether the sense of community is already established or needs to be strengthened, there is a place for peer teaching within all stages of development.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

What we do and make are fundamental to the function of our lives. All that we wish to acquire (success, happiness, fulfillment - no matter how interpreted) are either created or destroyed by what we do and how we make within the experience of our existence. From the beginning we learn, through our education, informal and not, how to do and make. This includes the development of language- how we first make words, moral growth – how we make decisions, and physical manifestations – how we take actions on those decisions. Upon our entrance to formal education, we are set on developing a focus of doing and making in order to secure a place in society. Once an expertise is decided upon, our skills contribute to advancing our knowledge in this field until a career is established. For most of us, we will continue to refine these skills, contribute to society, grow in knowledge, and how to best interact with others. This process, though complexly unique to each individual, is the formula that is life.

The question I have attempted to answer with the completion of this applied project is: how can we influence an earlier acknowledgment of the abilities of young children? Specifically, how can I, as an art educator, bring awareness to students of their own potential? The impressions of the first grade class that participated in the field test of the skill exchange unit exceeded any expectations I held at the onset of this project. The abilities they hold may seem predictable and unimportant. To do a flip on the trampoline, to count to ten, to make a bracelet out of duct tape, to draw a pigeon or a three dimensional square are reasonable abilities that many people hold. At the age of six and seven, all of us were able to do similar tasks. However, as impressed as I am with the unique skill of each child, which was not the expectation that was exceeded. Rather, the underlying significance is that these young children were able to
communicate what they were good at doing and making. Each was able to teach their ability to a peer and was excited to learn from their peers.

Was the skill exchange unit successful? If we are to gauge the success of a set of lessons by what a student has learned (if anything), then yes. Assessment interviews and reevaluation provides substantial evidence to show that students learned new skills from peers and have retained the information over a period of time. However, the more telling indicator of whether this lesson did what was intended can be found when a student carries this knowledge from school with them into their other “worlds.” This assessment, though nearly indiscernible, is the most telling.

Graduate school awakened my understanding to a much broader scope of ideas than I expected. I am thankful for the continuous exposure to complex ideas from philosophies of education. It is through these influences, and those of the students and professors I have the privilege to work with, that my own philosophy of education has been formed. Here, I have shared these influences, have discussed why I think they are important to education, specifically in the arts, and how I interpreted and applied them to the act of teaching.

Throughout the process of this applied project, two questions were on my mind. How can a skill exchange be situated in art education? And why? Over the past two years, my thoughts and philosophy have expanded outside art as a solitary subject. I came to graduate school with a strong interest in the arts and education. I come away with a greater understand of how art education can encompass more than the formal learning boundaries of a discipline. Art is not only an academic area of study, but can also be situated to one’s life in a natural and highly positive way. It is in this sense that arts education can be fitted to suit the lives of young students. Instead of fitting the student to the lesson, it is more important, and more effective, to mold the
content of a lesson to match its context, the context being the child, their life, and their happiness.

The greatest privilege of working with the concept of the skill exchange for over a year, in multiple settings and proposing the idea to graduate classes, is the feedback I have received. The greatest concern is that I will find a student that believes they have no abilities, that there is someone that thinks they have nothing to contribute to the class. While this is a valid concern, I can enthusiastically report that this has never happened. Even when there was threat of student hesitation, their peers would chime in with a skill they have observed in which the person in question excels.

The skill exchange has exposed three truths within the human experience. The first is the fact that everyone values skill. The second, since I have yet to meet a person with a skill of no absolute value, is that everyone has a skill to offer. And the third is that everyone has a need to obtain knowledge. If we were to collect the needs and wants of one school how many individuals could work together to serve and meet other’s needs within that learning environment? What could a child do with an awareness of their own ability? When people teach one another, it is clear that more than learning occurs. This exchange can build a mutual bond through human interaction, strengthen emotional wellness (especially in the young), stimulate brain activity, encourage empathy, and exhibit the importance of every part in a whole. This is the type of environment in which I want to teach. If we put more care into the acknowledgement that we are valued and that we value those around us how could our world benefit? Such an atmosphere would not then only be found in a school, this environment of mutual exchange of ability could enact a cultural shift where all of us find what we are fitted to do together and therefore, be happy.
References


Robinson, K. (February 4, 2010). Changing Paradigms. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCbdS4hSa0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCbdS4hSa0s).


Appendix

A. Visual Journal Images

All visual journal images, along with a profile about each student, can also be viewed online at https://brittanyranew.squarespace.com/the-skill-exchange/.

B. Student Skill Lists (I)

The following lists are the preliminary skills from the students’ writing. An asterisk (*) indicates the skill a peer desired to learn and the student taught.

Angela
- I am good at doing bracelets out of rubber bands.
- I am good at doing cartwheels.
- I can make a duct tape [bracelet].
- I can draw the pigeon. *
- I can make a book.
- I am good at jump[ing].
- I can make a wallet out of tape.

Barney
- I can make a house made of a box.
- I can make a flip with one leg.
- I can make a flip on the trampoline with one leg. *

Carolina
- I liked the soap making because I like the big black pot.
- I am really good at writing.
- I am good at singing.
- I am good at making church.
- I am good at writing.
- I am good at jumping in the air.
- I am good at playing on the playground.
- I am good at making 3D squares. *
- I am good at making necklaces out of beads.
- I am good at making pigeons.
- I am good at making cupcakes.
- I am good at eating food.
- I am good at making tally marks.
- I am good at making necklaces.
- I am good at making clay beads.
Derrick
    I liked the man with the fire and the metal in the fire.
    I’m good at playing at the playground.
    I’m good at playing soccer.
    I’m good at playing video games.*
    I’m good at playing baseball.

DJ
    I can draw like this [block letters]. *
    I run at [school].
    I run in PE.
    I can do a handstand.
    I can do a front flip on the trampoline and bed.

Elijah
    Fishing
    Running fast
    I am good at making lions.*

George
    I am great at making cars. *
    I am great at drawing stuff [and drawing golf carts] too.

Ian
    I like horses. I saw a horse.
    I am good at drawing cars and horses and writing and making sand castles and I can
    make a volcano.*
    I am good at soccer and front flips on a trampoline and drawing circles and playing
    games.

Mallory
    I am good at making a slide, and a swing and a sandbox.
    I can make a heart necklace. I can make a bracelet. *
    Duct tape, scissors, bracelet
    I can make a pigeon.
    I can make a flower.
    I can make a sun.
    I can make a…
    I am good at doing a cartwheel.
    I am good at showing a handstand [on the trampoline].
    I want a [pigeon].

Marigold
    I am good at running.
    I am good at drawing pigeons.
    I am good at making things [bracelet, cake].
I know how to draw ten. *

Nora
I am good at doing word problems.
I am good at writing.
I am good at doing necklaces. *
I can do eight cartwheels in a row.
I can make a book box.
I am good at counting to one hundred.
I am good at writing.
I am really good at painting and drawing Goldilocks and the Three Bears.
I am good at digging a really really really really really really really really deep hole.

Penelope
I am good at writing my friends’ names.
I’m good at playing at the [playground].
I am good at reading a book.
I am good at writing.
I am good at making a necklace out of play dough, bracelets and necklaces. *
I can read a book. *
I can make a pigeon. I can run [far]. *
I can slide on a slide at the playground. *
I can do back flips on the trampoline.

Ruby
I can make a cake.
I can draw a pigeon.
I am good at flipping on the trampoline. *
I can make a car with [bios].

Ricky
I like to make a bird house.
I can make a pigeon fly.*

Skylar
I am good at flowers.
I am [bad] at cartwheels.
I am good at doing pigeon. *

Sophia
I am so good at cartwheels.
I am so good at swinging high too. *
I can make a bracelet.
I can draw a pigeon.
I’m good at making a double star.
I’m a good artist.
I can teach my friend to dig a deep tunnel.

Thuy Thuong (No list)

Valerie
  Counting to ten.*
C. Student Skill Lists (2)

The following are collections of skills produced by each child three months after the skill exchange unit had been conducted. Each student was better able to access their skills and more willing to discuss what they were able to do with their peers. Writing was also predominant in each skill list produced. For the most part images accompanied the written skill and aided in the student’s communication. There are a number of developmental advances to take into consideration. The students are better able to communicate as a whole because they have nearly completed a year of schooling; this is true for their writing and speaking. The class is very comfortable with their peers, classroom teacher, and guest instructor (me). There is a noticeable difference in the comfort level expressed in the latter part of the year when compared to the beginning. No matter the terms for these changes in the condition of the classroom environment, it should be noted that all student confidence strengthened academically and personally over the course of this field test.

Angela
I know how to make an owl.
I am good at making friends laugh by making funny faces.
And I am good at making a cat it is in the sun.
I have to take a shower.
My grandmother has to…

Barney
I am good at dancing.
I can make a front flip.
I can make a house.

Carolina
I am good at making stars.
I am really good at talking.
I am good at eating food.
I am good at reading.
I am good at writing.
I am good at being good.
I am good at being healthy.

Derrick (No list)

DJ
I know that I am good at doing construction.
I am good at plumbing.

Elijah
I made a cup cake.
I am good at playing games.
I made a necklace.
I made a bracelet.
I made a good pigeon.

George
I am good at doing front flips and backflips.
And I can do a side flip.
And I am good at playing soccer.
And I am good at math and desk work and football.

Ian
I am good at soccer.
I am good at writing in school. Ruby
I am learning how to sew.
I am good at writing.
I am good at riding.
I am good at math.

Mallory (No list)

Marigold
I am good at sewing, I love to sew.
I am good at making snow men.
I am good at being quiet.
And I am good at drawing horse.
And I am good at teaching how to do k-nex.
I don’t know how to do front flips.
I am good at playing games.
I am good at reading.
I am good at being quiet in the house.
And I am good at running.
And I am good at math.
I am good at teaching about things.
Nora
I am good at roller skating.
I am good at playing the X-box.
I am good at math.
I am good at morning work.
I am good at reading to myself.
I am good at word work.

Penelope
I’m good at making cupcakes.
I’m good at cleaning for my mom.
I’m good at making owls for my teacher and my mom.
I’m good at making shapes.
I’m good at drawing pigeons for my teacher and my mom.
I’m good at math some times.
I’m [good] at chasing on a big dog.
I’m good at reading to Ms. Towns.
I’m good at doing texting a lot.
I’m good at drawing.
I’m good at sewing.
I’m good at drawing stars a lot.
I’m good at making snow men.
I’m good at writing.
I’m good at being quiet in the house.
I’m good at reading to my mommy.
I’m good at moving my clip for behavior for Ms. Towns.
I’m good at making bracelets and necklaces too.
I’m good at word work.

Ricky
I am good at doing a front flip.
I can do it with one hand or with two hands on the trampoline.
And I can make a spinner.
But I cannot do a front flip on the grass.
And I can go to work with my dad.
And pop a wheelie on a four-wheeler.
And I can play baseball.

Sophia
I’m so good at standing on my hands a long time.
I’m good at taking care of animals.
I’m good at drawing a squirrel.
I’m good at drawing a cat.

Skylar (No list)
Thuy Thuong
   I can run fast.
   I can play a game that is at my grandma’s.

Valerie
   Reading.
   Swinging.
   Basketball
   Writing.
   Making wallets.
   Math.
   Painting my nails.
**D. Student Interview Transcripts**

**Derrick**

Brittany: Alright Derrick, first I wanted to tell you about a friend of mine, she’s about your age and her name is Nicole. And she doesn’t think she’s good at doing anything. What can I do to help her figure out what she is good at doing?

Derrick: *(We are sitting near a pick up soccer game, a game Derrick just came from)* Soccer?

B: How could I see if she’s good at playing soccer?

D: Practicing?

B: Maybe we could play a soccer game together and I that would help her out, that’s a great idea, yeah. What if she doesn’t like soccer? What would I do then?

D: Um, you teach her how to do… math?

B: Teach her how to do math? Great, so just keep trying to find something that she really likes to do. That’s a really good idea. So, do you think it’s true that some people just aren’t good at doing anything? Do you think that’s true?

D: Yeah.

B: So let me tell you about another friend of mine. Her name is Victoria and she, whenever she’s at school she is helping her classmates, she likes helping them play soccer. Do you ever do things like that, help your classmates?

D: *(Nod.)*

B: What do you do to help them?

D: I help them play soccer and I help them pick up their stuff.

B: …them pick up their stuff? Good, that’s really good Derrick! *(Pause to watch students play)*

Ok now, my last question - and this one is an easy one - what makes you happy? When do you feel the most happy?

D: Playing soccer.

B: Playing soccer? I thought that maybe that would be your answer! What do you like about playing soccer?

D: *(Smiling.)* Making tricks.

B: Making tricks?! Can you show me some of those tricks that you make?

D: I can, um, put the ball on my knee. And I can, um, make it go up.

B: How did you learn how to do that?

D: My Dad taught me how to do it.

B: Very cool, do you even beat your Dad at soccer?

D: Yeah.

B: Yeah, haha. Well, it looks like they may need your help in that soccer game.
Carolina

Brittany: So, Miss Carolina, I just wanted to ask you about the skills that we have talked about in class, the things that you are really good at, um…
Carolina: Uh huh, doing.
B: Making and doing. So, do you enjoy thinking about that, thinking about the things you’re good at making and doing?
C: Mu-hum.
B: Is it easy for you?
C: It’s kinda hard.
B: What’s hard about it?
C: Like, it’s hard to like, write it kinda. Like when I’m doing it it’s hard to think about it sometimes. Sometimes I just write all I need and I forget about what I was going to write.
B: How do you think I could make that easier? Did it help to draw pictures with your writing? Did that help?
C: (Nod.)
B: And does it help to talk about what your good at making and doing with a friend?
C: I’m good at making three-d squares.
B: You are good at that, and who did you teach?
C: Everybody at my table.
B: Now how many people is that?
C: Five.
B: Five people?! Was it hard to teach five people how to do that?
C: No, might have been hard for them but it wasn’t too hard for me. I tried to teach Penelope but she would not listen.
B: Why not?
C: I don’t know. You gotta try to make ‘em kinda the same size or it’ll will look weird.
B: So her’s weren’t looking…
C: Right.
B: …not weird. Haha.
C: Haha.
B: Let’s see, well, do you think you’ll keep teaching people how to do things?
C: Mu-hum (yes).
B: And do you think you’ll keep asking people how they do things? Keep asking them to teach you things?
C: Mm-hum. I tried to do a cartwheel, I’m not fast enough.
B: But you’re learning.
C: Mmm-hum.
B: And how do you get better? If you want to do a really good cartwheel how do you get there? What do you have to do?
C: I have to practice some things on the trampoline.
B: And then hopefully after practicing enough times what will happen?
C: I can do a cartwheel!
B: Yeah, you’d be able to do a cartwheel right out here, huh?
C: Mmm-hum. Angela, and, um, Sophia, and Nora, can do cartwheels. One time, like, Nora did like six cartwheels in a row. It was a lot of cartwheels.
B: Wow, oh my goodness.
C: Ms. Towns says she does fifty cartwheels in a row before.
B: Ms. Towns (she is sitting two seats away), look at your hidden talents! Fifty cartwheels in a row!? Phew.
Ms. Towns: Hahaha.
B: I’m impressed.
C: I could not do that, haha.
B: No, me neither. I can’t even do one. I need to practice like you! Ok, so, my last question for you Carolina is what makes you happy?
C: Like, reading some books too.
B: Reading some books?
C: Like, about anything.
B: About anything. What do you think happiness means, what does that word mean?
C: When you think about something you really, really like maybe?
B: Yeah, that’s a good answer.
**Penelope**

Brittany: Alright Penelope, I wanted to ask you... Well, first of all I wanted to talk to you about a few different people that I that have to do with things that they know and things that they can teach. The first person I know his name is John, he’s a young boy and he’s about your age. You know, when John is in school he likes to show his friends what he is really good at doing. Um, and I was wondering if you, do you sometimes do that when you’re in school? Do you show people what your good at doing?  
Penelope: All kinds of stuff.  
B: All kinds of stuff. What do you show your classmates or your friends?  
P: I show ‘em how to make all kinds of bracelets and necklaces.  
B: Bracelets and necklaces, cool. What are they made out of?  
P: Um, it’s kinda like play dough but it ain’t.  
B: I remember you tellin’ me about that. Very cool. This other friend of mine, her name’s Nicole, and she doesn’t think she’s good at anything. Do you think that everyone has something that they can teach?  
P: Teach kids about being artists.  
B: Um hum, so what could I do to help her figure out what she’s good at doing?  
P: Writing, um, sentences that she has been doing.  
B: Like, maybe, I can help her think of things that she is good at doing and then she could write them down?  
P: And then she could remember it.  
B: And that will help her remember. That’s a good point, very good. So the last question I have for you Penelope, and this is very different, but I want to know what you think happiness is. What do you think happiness means?  
P: It means that you’re excited.  
B: And when do you feel the most happy?  
P: When, um, when I watch, like a movie.  
B: A movie, what kind of movie?  
P: Like a movie that just came out.  
B: A new movie, so something you’ve never seen before.  
P: *(Nod,)*  
B: Good, well I think that is all the questions I have for you. Good job, do you want to press the pause button?
**Ricky**

Brittany: Um, so, Ricky, the first thing I wanted to tell you about was a friend of mine, who, her name’s Nicole, but she doesn’t think she’s good at doing anything. And every time I ask her she says, I can’t do anything. Have you ever felt like that?

Ricky: No.
B: No, you haven’t. So how, how would you help Nicole so she could figure out what she’s good at doing?
R: Um, like if you are riding on the bus you could give her a note, a note, and she like, um, like in at this time she will bring notes.
B: What would the note say?
R: Um, like, your, your name and the bus and the date and the bus, um, bus number. And um, and also what level, it’ll say what level you’re in, like C or like B or A. And, um, and it says that the person that you’re gonna ride with, that you’re gonna get off, it says the person’s name.
B: So would you write a note to her about what she’s good at doing?
R: Um hum.
B: How else could you let her know what she is good at doing?
R: *(Pause.)*
B: How do you know what you’re good at doing?
R: Well, I write a lot.
B: You write a lot, you do. Do you just write?
R: And I can read good, and, um, I do my homework.
B: So, practicing helps you get better at something. Huh, that’s great! So there’s another person I know. A little boy that’s about your age and he…
R: Is he seven?
B: He’s seven years old, yeah, his name is John. And he, when he’s at school he, um, helps his classmates with things. Do you ever help your classmates when you’re at school?
R: *(Nod.)*
B: How, what do you do to help them?
R: Um, Thuy Thuong, I help him with morning work.
B: With morning work?
R: Um hum, and, um… I don’t know, I help with things.
B: I’m sure you do a ton. That’s ok you don’t have to tell me anymore. Ok, my last question is a fun one. What makes you the most happy?
R: Going to Chuck E. Cheese.
B: Going to Chuck E. Cheese. Why? Why does that make you the most happy?
R: I could go to, um, fair.
B: Going to a fair makes you happy too? What do you like at the fair?
R: Because, um, we can feel the animals and, and, when, um. Do you know those things that go back-and-forth, back-and-forth? Those.
B: Yeah, I like going to the fair too!
**Angela**

Brittany: So, Angela, see how these move as I talk? Let’s see what it does when you talk. Ok, so the first question I have for you, all the work I’ve been doing with your class I’ve been asking you to write down what you’re good at making and doing. And I want to know if you like thinking about what you’re good at making and doing? Do you like thinking about that? 
Angela: *(Nod.)*
B: What do you like about it? *(Pause.)* Let’s look at your journal ‘cause I know there are some wonderful drawings in here. Let’s see, can you read this first sentence to me? 
A: Bracelets.
B: Bracelets, yeah, and, what’s, what did you write before that? 
A: I am good at drawing bracelets out of rubber…
B: …rubber bands.
A: …and I am good at drawing cartwheels.
B: Cartwheels! And what did you draw next to that sentence? 
A: A cartwheel.
B: A cartwheel! Is that you? 
A: *(Nod.)*
B: That’s a really good drawing. *(Pages flipping)* Ooo, what does this one say? That’s a good one.
A: I can draw the pigeon.
B: The pigeon. It’s so much fun to look at these books. But I have a friend, her name’s Nicole, and she doesn’t think she's good at doing anything. Do you think that’s true, do you think she isn’t good at doing anything? *(Pause)* Like if we had some one in here, like if Nora *(Glances at student sitting across from us.)* thought she wasn’t good at anything. Would that be true? 
A: *(Shakes head.)*
B: No, so what could we do to show her she is good at doing something? *(Pause)* How could we help her? 
A: Something that you know what to do. 
B: Something, you could teach her something knew, is that what you’re thinking? 
A: *(Nod.)*
B: Yeah, that’s a great idea. And maybe you know something that she is good at doing that she’s having a hard time thinking of, could you tell her? 
A: Yes.
B: Ok, so, my last question for you Angela is what do you think happiness means? 
A: That you’re happy. 
B: And what does happy feel like? *(Pause)* What makes you really happy? 
A: Going to the castle park. 
B: Going to the castle park? What’s the castle park? 
A: Is has strips on the floor, has slides, it has this rope that you can go down. It looks like a castle. 
B: It sounds awesome. 
A: It has, it has a bridge up top, but it’s bouncy. 
B: So are you most happy when you’re at the castle, the castle playground? Yeah. 
A: *(Nod.)*
B: Great, well, thank you for talking to me.