

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study was designed to improve the methods of teaching the art standard of historical and cultural context in order to encourage a deeper appreciation and understanding of art in high school students enrolled in a crafts course. During the study, the researcher observed and reported on the experiences when cultural and historical perspectives were taught using learning cycles and incorporated with the production of crafts. The participants were six seniors, five sophomores, one junior, and two freshmen, who selected the craft course as an elective at their suburban high school.

The researcher introduced the Pennsylvania German and Japanese cultures to the students through learning cycles and small group activities. The learning cycles were composed of three phases: exploration, discussion/new content, and application/expansion. In addition, students produced artwork connected to the aesthetics of the cultures studied.

The researcher found that learning cycles and the incorporation of the four art standards were beneficial to the students in the crafts course in developing meaningful connections to artwork. By focusing on selected cultures, breaking down the interpretative steps, and building on students' prior knowledge, students developed the skills and understanding needed for art interpretation. Also students' production skills and written critical and aesthetic responses improved through learning cycles, practice sessions, and incorporation of the art standards.

While individual, small group, and full group discussions improved following a learning cycle, students' individual oral critique skills did not change. In addition, a field trip to the art museum played an important role in encouraging the students' interest in the arts.

As most students had a positive reaction to the learning cycles and activities that were carefully planned to encourage active participation, the researcher will continue to adapt the techniques to the needs of her students. Future research will examine the effect of learning cycles on students' confidence in oral art critiques and the connection between learning cycles and creativity. In addition, the research has allowed the teacher-researcher to learn to share more responsibility for learning with her students.