

The cover art features a close-up of a woman's face on the right side. She has dark hair and is wearing a dark jacket. Her face is partially covered in bright red face paint, which is applied in a circular pattern around her eye and cheek. The background behind her is a white wall with a faint, grey handprint visible on the right. On the left side of the cover, there are several red circles of varying sizes scattered vertically.

# Arts Education

in a

# Postnational State

Guest Edited by  
Madhavi Peters

**UNESCO Observatory**  
**Multi-disciplinary Journal in the Arts**  
Volume 6 | Issue 2 | 2020

# UNESCO Observatory

## Multi-Disciplinary eJournal in the Arts

Volume 6 | Issue 2 | 2020

**GUEST  
EDITOR**

**Madhavi Peters**

**EDITORIAL  
TEAM**

**Editor-in-chief**  
Lindy Joubert

**Designer**  
Seraphina Nicholls

**Associate Editor**  
Naomi Berman

### **ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL**

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal that promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence. Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

ISSN 1835 - 2776

UNESCO E-Journal:  
an Openly Published Journal affiliated  
with The UNESCO Observatory at  
The University of Melbourne.

Edited and published by Lindy Joubert

Founding Director of the inaugural  
UNESCO Observatory.

Email: [lindyaj@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:lindyaj@unimelb.edu.au)  
Endorsed by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education

### **COVER IMAGE**

'Apitaw-Picikwas' (half apple).

**Artist / model:**  
Lana Whiskeyjack,

**Photo:**  
Rebecca Lippiatt  
2014

This was a collaboration between  
Edmonton-based photographer  
Rebecca Lippiatt and  
art actionist / educator  
Lana Whiskeyjack's alter-ego,  
'Apple', in Cree, 'Picikwas'.

**Cover page design:**  
Seraphina Nicholls

# What Do You Notice: Taking Schools to Art

Dr Gillian Kydd

---

## BIOGRAPHY

Dr Gillian Kydd is a visionary educator who co-founded the innovative Open Mind / Campus Calgary program as a science specialist with the Calgary Board of Education and was the director of the program for the following ten years. Within the program model, teachers are given the opportunity to move their classroom to an interesting community site for a week of immersion. If students are equipped by their class teachers beforehand with observation and critical thinking skills, as well as drawing and descriptive writing skills, the learning can be powerful in any community space, whether a zoo, museum or art gallery. The program also allows participants to slow down and see the world through a new lens. The concept has since moved to many other cities across North America and beyond.

Sarah\*, a primary school teacher, was nervous and excited. Many of her students were kneeling on the front seat of the Sea Bus, a small commuter ferry that crosses Vancouver Harbour. Since leaving their public school on the east side of Vancouver that morning they had already been on a public bus and a train. Their destination was the beautiful new Polygon Gallery on the waterfront in North Vancouver. (The Gallery focuses on photography and media based art.) But this was not your usual field trip. These 8 and 9 year olds were going to be making this journey back and forth each day for the entire week. Many of them had never been to the downtown harbour, and some of their families were new to Canada. The children were trying to make sense of all the hustle and bustle: the freighters, the seals popping up, the helicopters and float planes swooping overhead.

When Sarah had heard about this innovative Polygon Gallery School program, she had jumped at the chance to participate. The essence of the program is that the students come for an entire week, the teacher is 'in the driver's seat' with support from the site coordinator and each week is tailor-made for the needs of the teacher. As well as a program each day with a resource person at the site, there are long periods of time when the students are observing, using journals to write descriptively and to draw. The students have been taught observation skills by the classroom teacher ahead of time. The week itself acts as a catalyst for a teacher-designed interdisciplinary study that might continue for the whole year. This was a perfect fit for Sarah. She tried to provide her students with as many interesting experiences as possible. This was to be a whole week immersed in the life and art of the Gallery, and experiencing the fascinating waterfront, so full of activity and history.

As the silver structure came into view, the children's excitement grew. 'That's where we are going!' It didn't take long for the group, which included parent volunteers, to reach the entrance, where Nellie Lamb, the Gallery School coordinator, was waiting for them. Sarah soon began to relax. The children were fascinated with their behind-the-scenes tour that morning. The secret elevator and the workshops were popular. The coordinator and Sarah had together planned the schedule for the morning sessions for the rest of the week.

She had wanted a visit from a local historian who would cover the fascinating stories of the waterfront, and a walk on the nearby Spirit Trail with an Elder of the Squamish native band. Thursday was to be a tour of the exhibits with Justin, one of the gallery curators. On Friday, the coordinator had booked an artist to talk about her video installation with the class and then do a hands-on project with them.

As the week went on, Sarah discovered that afternoons were the really special time. The class spent over an hour observing in the galleries. The students chose a piece that interested them, and armed with their hardcover journals and a pencil, they settled down on the floor. Their aim was to write about what they saw and their thoughts about it, and to draw all or part of the piece. There was little hesitation: after all they had been working on these habits of mind since school began in September. Sarah had attended a summer workshop that Nellie had led for the teachers who were participating that year. Thus, Sarah knew how to prepare her students. They had learned to draw, using objects and art prints. They had learned to look at art by slowing down and using the steps of visual literacy: first looking at colour, shapes, objects, texture and people, then making inferences, and finally linking that to their own feelings and experiences.



Figure 1\*\*

A teacher has moved her classroom to the stunning Polygon Gallery in North Vancouver 2019

As Sarah responded to their journal entries each night, she couldn't believe what she was seeing. Almost all these Grade 3/4 students were writing pieces that were far superior and lengthier than they did at school. Several boys who usually did little writing were producing a page or more, as were the three children who were learning English. Two students who had particularly worried her because of their potential for disruptive behaviour stayed focused on the art every day.



**Figure 2**  
A student records her observations at a gallery 2019



**Figure 3**  
Written by Esther \*  
Grade 3  
in Sarah's class at the Polygon  
Gallery  
2018

Back at school after the week at the Polygon, Sarah continued to weave their new experiences and skills into her curriculum for the remainder of the year. For example, she decided to take her class to the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) to see the French Modernists exhibit. Instead of booking a traditional school program however, Sarah designed a study of the artists and their works at school, drawing from prints of the artworks. When on site at the VAG, the students chose a piece and wrote descriptively in their journals, spread out in the galleries, working quietly for an hour.

Later in the year she worked with the Vancouver Opera on a project where the class created their own mini-opera with help from a professional singer and a composer. The resulting work was about a famous crossing of the North West Passage and an Inuit girl and her family who had accompanied the ship. The theme evolved from an interdisciplinary study of the Arctic that included a day at the Vancouver Maritime Museum where the actual ship is on exhibit. The project involved research, lyric writing and backdrop design, all of which drew upon the skills they had learned from the Gallery School process. They performed their mini-opera at the Maritime Museum for family and visitors.

**Figure 4**  
Sarah's student John\*  
Age 9  
Drawing a detail from a 19th  
century photograph of the  
Persepolis ruins  
2018



## Other Sites

Sarah's class was not exceptional: other sites that use the same model report similar outcomes. Polygon Gallery School is based on a program that I co-founded with a very wise philanthropist, Don Harvie, in Calgary in 1993. At that time, I was a science consultant with the school district. We began at the Calgary Zoo and then approached other sites, such as the Glenbow Museum, the Science Centre and Calgary City Hall. We quickly discovered that the same process of critical viewing worked at any interesting community site. There are now fourteen sites under the umbrella of the Calgary Board of Education. Edmonton sites also embraced the idea, and there are thirteen sites there, including City Hall, the Legislature, a concert hall and the Citadel theatre complex. Other cities followed in Alberta and across the country from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Vancouver, British Columbia, and also overseas, in Michigan, in Los Angeles at the Hammer Museum, in Singapore, and recently in Spain. The majority of students are aged 7-12, but there are middle school classes and occasionally secondary groups. It works best when there is one teacher on site all week, who is also teaching that class full time at school.

At this point there are more than 25,000 students and their teachers participating per year in programs based on the concept. We discovered early on that many different types of community resources could be the focus. Students use the same process of observation whether they are watching the Siberian tigers every day at a zoo, drawing a Siksikaitsitapi/Blackfoot basket at a museum, attending a City Council meeting or writing about a prairie crocus at a nature site. The site provides interesting experiences, and the students learn about that site, but they are also learning to see the world with different eyes.

It is very much a loosely connected grassroots movement. Each community is free to create their own name for the model and they are responsible for their own funding, but it is understood that they commit to certain components: extended time at the site, the classroom teacher in charge and students are given time to attend to something that is meaningful for them. Time and choice are crucial. The network is called Beyond the Classroom Network, and there is a website (<https://bctcn.ca>) that describes the concept. It includes a list of current sites and provides links to resources. The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Hammer Museum created an excellent film that captures the model (2013).



**Figure 5**  
A student observes gorillas at  
the Zoo School in Calgary  
2015

## Student Learning

The powerful impact on learning isn't simply a result of a week's immersion at a site. It is all the work on habits of mind, i.e. observation skills, writing and drawing, that takes place before they come that makes that week so powerful, and the way the teacher uses the week as a catalyst for the entire year. Children (and the adults with them) learn to focus, to slow down and to absorb more of what they are experiencing.



The ability to focus is quite amazing to witness and shows clearly what children are capable of when given the skills and the opportunities to be fully engaged.

*“I love how Gallery School focuses on encouraging creative thinking and developing visual literacy through conversation and response to exhibits and artwork. Such a great way to promote critical thinking about the visual world around us, and so important to give access and exposure to kids of families that may otherwise not have the opportunity to do so.” (Parent from Sarah’s class 2018, pers. comm.)*

## Attention

When I visit a class participating at a site, I am most moved by the way children behave in their time to observe. Almost all students are able to focus if the classroom teacher has inculcated certain habits of mind skills before they come, even those with learning difficulties or behaviour issues, or for whom English is their second language. When there is joy in learning and the motivation is intrinsic, then the stage is set for what Csikszentmihalyi calls ‘the flow experience’ (1990). When the students are asked what they liked most about the week, they often will say it was that time when they were quietly working in their journals. When I meet alumni of the program who are now adults, their most vivid memories are what they observed, whether it was a life jacket from the Titanic, a particular art piece or a meerkat.

Today many people are worried about the impact of distraction. In her extensively researched book *Distracted* (2008), Maggie Jackson describes the importance of attention and how it is being weakened. Attention is the foundation for deep reading, for processing information, for critical thinking and problem solving. This weakening in attention is becoming worse as technology seduces us to spend more and more time watching screens, seeing only the veneer of life. We multi-task, rushing through our day, and our children’s lives are just as hectic.

*‘The way we live is eroding our capacity for deep, sustained, perceptive attention – the building block of intimacy, wisdom and cultural progress’ (Jackson 2008, p. 13).*

## Connecting to the World

At the site, through specially designed programs, reflective time and sharing, students discover a better sense of how they belong in the world, and how their values and ideas can be part of an interconnected worldview. They learn that they are part of the community and that their voices are important.

*I felt that my students began to look at the world around them and think about what they could do to be a great citizen. They are empowered to change things ... to voice their opinion.*  
(Teacher at Edmonton City Hall School 2019, pers. comm.)

## Writing

We constantly hear from teachers that student writing improves as a result of this program. In an elegantly designed evaluation of how the program impacted writing skills, Cathy Cochrane (2004) tested twelve classes of Grade 3 Calgary students, half of whom participated in the program. (Cochrane used objects to trigger the student writing and tested the classes in the fall and spring. She and another marker used the Alberta Department of Education provincial testing rubrics for the writing assessment.) Writing skills had improved by six percent over the year with the control group, but there was an impressive twenty-four percent improvement with the classes who had participated. Of course, this wasn't entirely due to being at the site for one week, but due to the cumulative effect of having the classroom teacher working on open-ended descriptive writing connected to interesting experiences over the school year.

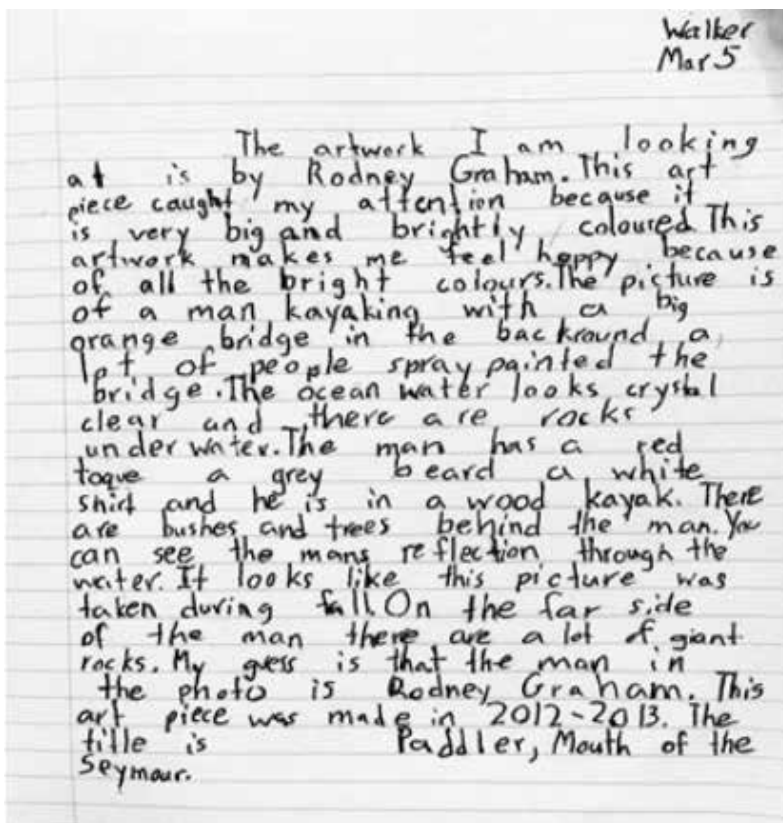


Figure 6  
Grade 5 boy's description of artwork at the Polygon Gallery, Vancouver, 2018

## Impact on Teachers

Teachers too are changed by this process. It is the ultimate form of professional development: the teachers work with their own students, while they are supported by other professionals who encourage them to teach in new ways. The evidence of the impact on their students is very clear for them to see. It isn't uncommon for us to hear a teacher say that this has been the highlight of her career so far. Teachers continue to use the outside community in their teaching and feel more confident about taking the learning journey beyond the school.

In my doctoral research, I focused on the effects on teacher practice and in particular, the case study of one teacher who participated in Glenbow Museum School (Kydd 2004). I observed Susan\* and her class over a year. She became much more confident in interpreting curriculum guidelines in more meaningful ways, and she began to use the outside community whenever possible. Susan became a senior administrator in her school district and is a mentor for many other teachers.

*I cannot even to begin to put into words what the week meant to me ... Gallery School is exactly what gives me hope for students. I loved the focus on critical thinking and child-centred learning. It was also my pleasure that my student teacher could experience this to launch her teaching career. Absolutely the best thing I've done in all my 30 years of teaching. (Teacher in Vancouver 2019, pers. comm.)*



**Figure 7**  
A class journaling at  
The Rooms,  
the provincial museum in  
St. John's, NL,  
2015

## But Is This Just a Blip in the World of Education?

Let's think about the grand scheme. The world is in trouble. The news is depressing. Every day we hear more about the deep divisions in the United States, Britain and other countries. The basic structures of democracies are threatened, and we worry about climate change. Young people and others protest, but the wheels of governments and business turn slowly with little effect.

The media is awash with misinformation, and there is deep distrust of experts and science, and decreasing empathy for others. Countries vote in leaders who have nothing but their own gain and vanity at heart. Entertainment is an all-enveloping distraction.

## **How Did We Get to This Place and Can We Make Changes?**

I believe in the power of education. I believe in the capacity of every child to be a thoughtful, wise and empathetic citizen, but how is that accomplished? The ways that the majority of children are educated throughout the world today result in a population that gets swept along, leading to what we see today. The framework of schooling is the industrial model. Children begin life as creative, bright problem solvers, learning through real life, and if lucky, surrounded by language. Soon, however, they become akin to industrial widgets, in a building isolated from the real world, in the care of an adult who is pressured to teach her class by following a plan that is laid out by those in charge. What does that plan look like?

In much of the world, the pattern looks remarkably similar in the primary years. Much of every day is spent on reading, writing and math. Of course, children need to learn those tools to be literate, functioning adults, but they are skills. Humans have created those skills in order to survive in our world. A skill has a purpose. We read and write in order to communicate, but it is communicating about something of importance to us. It is the same with numeracy.

The traditional primary years model sees the development of skills as an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. It is true that children need to spend time on phonics and other basics of reading, but the majority of that time should be spent on connecting reading and writing to interesting topics like the history of their town, the boats in the harbour, the insects in the park nearby, or the physics of colour, of sound, of electricity. They should be given ample time to draw and write about those experiences, to read information and stories about their topics, and to work on projects together. Thus, they learn to see the world more carefully, to be critical problem solvers and to work with each other.

In the older grades there is more exposure to other subject areas, but the focus becomes the absorption of information. There is little time allowed for students to understand concepts for themselves. The main mode of so-called learning is memory and regurgitation, rather than the development of critical thinking skills. The result is a population that is susceptible to misinformation.

If our children were taught in other ways, I believe there would be changes. We would have thoughtful, empathetic citizens who are informed and critical. They would also insist on having leaders who are wise, ethical and informed. They would be able to discern fact from fiction on the internet and make careful choices. It would be a different world. But how do we accomplish that?

## A Different Curriculum

There are existing models of teaching and learning, such as Reggio Emilia, the Primary Years Program in the International Baccalaureate Program and schooling in Finland, that have moved away from that traditional model. These models break down the silos in their curriculum and emphasize a multidisciplinary approach. Overarching themes or 'big ideas' provide a framework for a long-term interdisciplinary study, designed by the teacher, which springs from the needs and interests of the students. Children are involved in experiential project work where literacy and numeracy skills are integrated in meaningful ways.

But there are barriers to making the changes that are necessary. The strong focus on literacy and numeracy, as discussed previously, is one, but another hurdle is the artificial division between STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and arts education. What the Beyond the Classroom Network strongly demonstrates is that the processes in the arts and in science are very similar. Those processes, i.e. exploring, observing, making inferences and communicating their thoughts to others, are how we help students to make sense of the world, whether they are watching the gorillas at a zoo, learning Morse Code at a museum or describing a piece of art in a gallery.

The best scientists, engineers and artists are those who are curious and pay attention. Creativity is being alive to your surroundings and being willing to take risks. Jane Goodall embedded herself with chimpanzees and observed them carefully for years. Her techniques were revolutionary and changed the way scientists learn about the natural world. Alexander Fleming noticed changes in the growth on Petri dishes that he had discarded on a windowsill and thus discovered penicillin. Picasso was an astute observer who reinterpreted the real world in multiple ways that changed art forever.

How we educate our children is perhaps the most powerful tool that we have to change the world for the better. It is vital that we all work together and realize that the arts and sciences use one large lens to see the world and its inhabitants. Children recognize this and so should we.

As Eleanor Duckworth, an eminent Harvard educator, says to her students, 'What do you notice?' That is the key.

\* Not real names

\*\* All photographs by Gillian Kydd

## References

Beyond the Classroom Network 2011, *Beyond the classroom network*, Beyond the Classroom Network, viewed 3 April 2020, <<https://btcn.ca>>

Cochrane, C 2004, 'Landscapes for learning', *Educational Leadership: Teaching for Meaning* vol. 62, no.1, pp. 78-81.

Csikszentmihalyi, M 1990, *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York.

Duckworth, E 1987, *The having of wonderful ideas and other essays on teaching and learning*, Teachers College Press, New York.

Dewey, J 1938, *Experience and education*, Macmillan, New York.

Gardener, H 1991, *The unschooled mind*, Basic Books, New York.

International Baccalaureate 2014, *International baccalaureate*, International Baccalaureate, viewed 11 January 2020, <<https://ibo.org>>

Jackson, M 2008, *Distracted: the erosion of attention and the coming dark age*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY.

Janes, R & Conaty, G (eds.) 2005, *Looking reality in the eye: museums and social responsibility*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary, AB.

Kydd, G 2004, *Seeing the world in 3D: learning in the community*, Trafford Pub., Victoria, BC.

Reggio Children 2019, *Reggio Children*, Reggio Children, viewed 11 January 2020, <<https://reggiochildren.it>>

Sahlberg, P 2011, *Finnish lessons – what can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* Teachers College Press, New York.

UCLA Arts 2013, *Classroom in residence at the Hammer Museum, video recording*, YouTube, viewed 14 January 2020, <<https://youtu.be/yGPS9i5hNbU>>