

DOCTORAL THESIS

Art history in an infant primary school an intervention in the curriculum

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ART HISTORY IN AN INFANT PRIMARY SCHOOL:
AN INTERVENTION IN THE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This research set out to introduce art history in the art curriculum in an infant primary school in England. The intention was to broaden the curriculum to include interpreting art alongside making it. At the time the research began the National Art and Design Curriculum (2005) for Key Stage One included an art historical strand of learning known as Attainment Target Two (AT2) which included learning about art and artists from different times and cultures. Previous research indicated this strand of the art curriculum was overlooked by generalist classroom teachers for various reasons.

A whole school action research project was undertaken lasting a full academic year. The participants were five teachers including the headteacher, three classroom teaching assistants, eighty four pupils, aged between four and seven years, and the researcher. The research tested out and evaluated a strategy for interpreting artworks. This was designed by the researcher and taught by the teachers in the classroom. The interpretive strategy for engaging and enquiring about art (known as the ISEE) included information about the art and artist in the final step of interpretation. The action research consisted of three cycles: i) preparation, planning and teacher training; ii) teachers implementing the ISEE and iii) teacher-designed lessons and research evaluation. Systematic reflection and evaluation of actions was carried out on two levels by the action team and the lead researcher and final reflective and thematic analyses were carried out by the latter in order to answer the research questions.

The main finding was that the ISEE facilitated art interpretation in the classroom. Other significant findings were that i) interpreting paintings was inclusive of all pupils across the age groups and learning ability spectra; ii) the pupils' affective response (Iser, 2006) often drove their cognition and this challenged the theory underpinning the research that art is interpreted through symbol references in meaning making; iii) when pupils used their imagination and affective response they were able to accommodate the factual information they were given about the paintings and artists; iv) despite struggling to include this information in their teaching at times, the teachers recognised that it added value to the art curriculum and the pupils expressed great interest in it and iv) the teachers preferred to combine art interpretation with other subjects such as literacy, citizenship and PSHE.

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For my father

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