Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson #2

Title: Harvesting Conversations – Making Your Mark

Lesson By: Maureen West, Central High School, Cheyenne, WY

Grade Level/Subject Areas: 9-12; Ceramics 1 and 2

Duration of Lesson: 1 - 85 minute class period.

Content Standards:
Wyoming Fine and Performing Arts
FPA 11.1 Creative Expression through Production; Students, create, perform, exhibit, or participate in the arts.
FPA 11.2 Aesthetic Perception; Students respond to, analyze, and make informed judgments about the arts.
FPA 11.3 Historical and Cultural Context; Students demonstrate an understanding of the arts in relation to history, cultures, and contemporary society.

Lesson Abstract:
Wondering is at the heart of witnessing in our world. Through witnessing we invite ordinary moments into form as insights and through an aesthetics lens perceive their truth and beauty. Mohandas K. Gandhi understood the transformation through aesthetics and invited the world to wonder why not ahimsa and sarvodaya? Through reflective practice and discourse we can embrace our own transformational learning of ahimsa and sarvodaya. Students can use art to make their thinking visible in the world and craft meaning for themselves and others. Ceramics is a vehicle for harvesting these conversations, finding what we value and making our mark to honor what we believe.

Enduring Understandings:
Art is reflective practice strengthened through discourse. Aesthetics invites discourse around values such as truth and beauty. Arthur L. Costa’s 16 Habits of Mind invites mindfulness to discourse.

Guiding Essential Questions:
What value do I see in Art for reflective practice?
How do aesthetic experiences influence a change in perception?
How do the Habits of Mind invite mindful thinking through art?
How does art make thinking visible?

Content Essay:
Wonder is the essence, the heart of learning; it is the rhythm of change. Wonder elevates our senses calling us to respond, perhaps to query, perhaps to engage. Observation and reflection are as breathing in and exhaling out. Wholeness witnessed marks our memory, waiting for naming to lend understanding. Arthur L. Costa speaks of wondering in Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind.
“And, like Jane Smiley’s narrator in *A Thousand Acres*, I’ve found value in wondering because ‘there was wondering to be done, not because there were answers to be found.’” (Costa p. 238) This wondering does not skip a beat, continuing the cycle of external to internal; return to external, follow with internal and so on. Art Costa had me at wondering when he stated a few pages later “The combination of awe and doubt is a particularly potent mixture. Both have a way of opening us up to learning. We become engaged with the object of our awe.” (Costa, p. 254)

I am in awe of Mohandas K. Gandhi. The opening welcome to the Ahimsa Center’s Summer Institute for K-12 Educators asserts “Gandhi’s enduring significance is anchored in his uncompromising commitment to *ahimsa* or nonviolence – the experience of oneness with others and nature – as the foundation for his vision of humanity, and for the well-being and happiness of all, which he called *sarvodaya*.” (Sethia, Intro) His vision for a civil society was aesthetic and artfully crafted. Gandhi promoted a change of heart through art. I wonder if art has a place in this world of ahimsa and *sarvodaya*.

We have evidence that Gandhi experienced joy and wonder in art. I am in awe of his grasp of aesthetics cultivated the social innovation of *sarvodaya* and he invited the world to join him. I wonder what study of aesthetics invited this perception. Gandhi looked at seemingly ordinary phenomena and asked if it must be so. What if a civil society was guided by truth and honesty in service of the well-being for all?

If we look through Gandhi’s experience with the lens of Art Costa’s Habits of Mind we find a man so compassionate he would work in the service of others. Perhaps wonder and awe is at the level of talisman. “Education philosopher Thomas Green proposes that wonder is rooted in our knowledge that things need not be as they are. Green suggests that it is when we wonder at the ordinary – recognizing that while ordinary things can be depended on to occur, they need not always occur – we sustain our wonder and interest.” (Stewart, p. xiii) With wonder Gandhi pursued his personal questions of truth, love, compassion as being of value for all. Marilyn G. Stewart considers that “Human beings have paused over time to wonder at, explore, and offer explanations for seemingly ordinary phenomena – things we most often take for granted.” Furthermore, she states “We humans also seem to have the need to create order out of chaos, in wondering at and asking questions about ordinary things and events, we have placed conceptual limits on and have made distinctions about these phenomena. As adults, as teachers, and as students, we often wonder at the ordinary.” (Stewart, p. xiv)

In many ways the accessible nature of wondering about the ordinary is an affirming way of being in the world, the clarity that comes from noticing details of our world invites the realization that human connection is of great value. Teaching is an act of wondering, questioning and finding avenues for discovering the invisible – thinking. Echoing Gandhi perhaps avenues of aesthetics are invitational and expressive. Aesthetics ask us what it means to feel and to believe – all part of the invisible world of our mind. Mindfulness witnesses the ordinary through a filter of reflection. What if aesthetics invites the wonder and awe of mindfulness into our learning community? If we honored the feeling of human connection as the change we wish to see in our learning community might *ahimsa* and *sarvodaya* find us?

“The nature of dialogue could be described as one person’s conclusions becoming another person’s questions. As philosophers have addressed the views of one another about art over time, they have entered into what might be considered an extended dialogue. Brought forward by interesting philosophical questions, the dialogue is the central activity of philosophical inquiry, whether in the past or in the here and now.” (Stewart, p. 36) Through dialogue we bring wonder and awe to the level of witnessing – to the level of thinking revealed. It is the heart of understanding to take the evidence of various viewpoints and synthesize meaning. Perhaps art invites experience we
can name in the service of our thinking. Thinking through art merges our internal dialogue with our experience in the presence of change.

Gandhi’s dialogue with the work of Coomaraswamy, Tolstoy and Ruskin crafted his transformational learning of aesthetics for his vision of ahimsa and sarvodaya. In Coomaraswamy’s writing he found the connection between art and life to be an expression of harmony best expressed through music but woven through our ordinary lives. Through Ruskin, Gandhi discovered the expression of labor as an aesthetic experience that lifted up the human spirit. Tolstoy’s view of art indicated that the artist and an ordinary man could understand each other’s humanity through a shared emotional response to art. Each man wrote of ideas that uplifted the human spirit and matched Gandhi’s fundamental concern for the well-being of all.

The journey of embracing transformative learning through aesthetic experience is best expressed for me through visual art – clay is my preference. For each student to reach their potential through compassionate, interdependent teaching and learning requires discourse about what we value. We learn together because we are not alone. We learn together because we live in a democracy that values each of us as integral to the whole of us. We learn together because great minds think, and compassionate minds care. Yes, I do ask my students to self-reflect on their learning practice. I am asking them to analyze, question, write about, and paraphrase, their learning. I ask them to raise their standards for their learning, to hold me accountable for offering them wings to fly, a heart to feel compassion, a voice to defend the weak and perhaps, just maybe, echo the brilliance of their new thinking.

Art holds thinking at the level of witnessing. It makes our thinking visible so that reflective practice can live in discourse. We can learn because we share our thinking; we share the labor of our craft, we make objects that reflect our meaning. For me, the classroom has always felt like democracy in action. Collaborative inquiry invites all of us in the classroom to witness quality thinking, participate respectfully, and work side-by-side to achieve new understanding. For me, shared understanding is at the heart of democracy in the classroom.

How does contemplation assist the students with their locus of control of their own scholarship? It is clear through Gandhi’s work between Ahimsa and Sarvodaya the message of nonviolence for all is a values based code of conduct that manifests integrity. The means to this end renews the struggle for truth, honesty and right means. It connects the soul to self and invites the soul into community. Authentic art opens the heart and makes thinking visible. The struggle for high school students is finding the patience to remain present with their work; to live in the clarity of their knowledge and personal expression. It is humbling to be vulnerable with this work in public school education. I know that going slow to bring their identity to the table is met with diversions and challenges to both time and self-discipline. Yet with the right means students grow tall in themselves, perhaps tall enough to help one another.

“We Are the Ones” by Christina Baldwin invites the act of hosting to a way to wake up the sleeping. A series of her questions:

- What comes into the world when we talk about what matters and act on what inspires us?
- How can we contribute to a culture of conversation that will reknit the human community?” (Baldwin, p. 188.)

It’s time to harvest those conversations. My students can access heartfelt connections to this world. It seems criminal to ask them to walk this world without the purpose of truth, beauty and happiness as their armor integrating the wholeness that is a moral imperative for bringing their soul force into community. I am certain more than ever before that a compassionate community working
together will create the hope I have for our future generations. I work with students that have such capacity for learning with their whole personalities on that I wonder what we can do together.

Bibliography:
Day 1 Crafting Bowl and Story; Inviting Self-Reflection

### How do I make my mark?

**ART Workshop Learning Targets:**
- I can speak and listen respectfully with others.
- I can form new connections with stories of my experience.
- I can form visual and written metaphors that voice my story.

**Drawing is Mark Making**

“Drawing is a process of mark making. Drawing is thinking made visual. Humans have used the process of mark making as a tool to understand and describe the world around us as well as the world within us.” Benjamin Degen

Today we are inviting author Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit*, Learn IT and Use IT for Life, Page 4-6.

**Noticing – Pair/Share Protocol**
- What do you notice about the story? What describes Twyla Tharp’s identity? Write your noticings on one side of the index card. Draw a line at the end of your noticings.
- Turn to your neighbor to share your noticings. Choose who will speak first. After listening to your neighbor, write their noticings on your card.

**Rhythm is Marking Time –**

**Mini-Lesson 1**

**Your Identity Symbol**

**Rhythm is marking time –**

What is rhythm? What rhythms mark time in our daily life? How is rhythm visible in the work we do?

**Noticing – Pair/Share Protocol**
- Investigate the assorted stamping tools at your table.
- Review the internet for stamping protocols.
- Look at logos using positive and negative space.
- Draw ideas for your own identity stamp.
- Create a clay identity stamp.

**Mini-Lesson 2**

**Let Your Light Shine Candleholder**

**Noticing & Naming (See-Think-Wonder)**

Where am I? (in this artwork) - **Drop Slab Candleholder**
- Create a pattern of coils and shapes.
- Roll and smooth a slab of clay.
- Drop the slab over the pattern.
- Stand the slab around a canned food item.
- Remove the can of food and attach all seams.
- Pierce design in candleholder.
- Donate canned food item to food drive.

How does donating food make a mark in your community? How does making your mark reflect your values and beliefs? What marks do gestures of good will leave behind in your community?

**Do-Brief**

Synthesizing Information

How have you made your mark today?

What Habits of Mind served you well today?