

Employing the Jenlink Poetic as a Social Construct: A Critical Personal Narrative Analysis

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Rebecca R. Fredrickson
Texas Woman's University

Abstract

Both in the United States and on an international scale, the concepts of teacher accountability, high stakes testing, and fully inclusive classrooms leave teachers feeling unable to meet the needs of all of their students. This accountability is found in the elementary, middle school, high school, and university levels of education. This article is a critical narrative analysis examining the problem presented and postulating use of the Jenlink Poetic as an arts-based educational inquiry methodology to assist teachers in meeting the needs of all students.

With the overzealous use of standardized testing, methodologies using concepts such as reflective analysis and critical thinking are fading away to be replaced by testing methods and information being taught at the lowest levels of learning. According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2006), as the emphasis on standards and testing has increased, “many educators sense that both teaching and learning have been redirected in ways that are potentially impoverishing for those who teach and those who learn” (p. 1). This phenomenon has unfortunately also found its way into the collegiate classrooms. Across college campuses students are being told the importance of "certification exams" in a multitude of fields including: medical (nursing, physician, dental assistants, & pharmacological), computer information systems (multiple different certification options), engineering, trade occupations (beauty, electrical, and plumbing), business, accounting, human resources, and all aspects of educational preparation (teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators).

Teacher education programs have come under attack in recent years and certification successes are being examined as one of the measures of determining a program's success. Even at the collegiate level, programs are being assessed based on the number of completed professional certifications. Thus, often the classroom instruction lends itself to the idea of preparing for an exam and not to reflective thinking (Baines, 2006).

How are teachers able to meet the diverse and unique needs of their students, conform their classrooms and their teaching to the required standards and accountability measures, and still have successful classrooms where children are able to grow, mature, and become critical thinkers? This question continues to plague teachers in the United States and around the world, as they try to do their best for their children in their classrooms (Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2003). This article will serve as a critical personal narrative analysis examining the problem

presented and proposes a beginning step to assist with this issue. A critical personal narrative analysis is a mixture of two different methodologies for examining information. Taken from the concept of the personal narrative analysis and critical qualitative research, this method of examining material uses aspects of both concepts to build a reflective narrative that strives to change a social wrong or injustice (Burdell & Swadener, 1999).

Teacher Accountability

According to Robertson (2003), “the concept of accountability is one which has become very popular over the last decade in political debates about education in many Anglophone countries” (p. 277). Anglophone countries are defined as the countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Within the United States, the administration is looking for a new culture of accountability for teachers and schools (Dinan, 2009). According to Dinan (2009), in the same speech where President Obama called for teacher accountability, he also laid partial blame for low student performance at the feet of their parents by stating:

The bottom line is that no government policies will make any difference unless we also hold ourselves more accountable as parents, because government, no matter how wise or efficient, cannot turn off the TV or put away the video games. Teachers, no matter how dedicated or effective, cannot make sure your children leave for school on time and do their homework when they get back at night. ¶4

On an international level, the impact of teacher accountability can also be felt.

Researchers such as Robertson (2003) have found that the teacher accountability systems too often overemphasize economics at the expense of teacher and student needs. Sahlberg (2010) stated, “Market-like efficiency measures have brought standards, testing, and the race for higher achievement as measured by these tests to the centre of lives of teachers and students – both in

and out of schools” (p. 48). By using test-based accountability practices, teachers are trapped between “school for capital and moral purpose with student-centered pedagogy and learning on one side, and efficiency-driven education with teacher-centered instruction and achievement on the other” (p. 49).

Diversity and Differentiated Instruction in the Classroom

Diversity Instruction

Schools are becoming increasingly more diverse. As immigration continues to grow within the United States, the impacts of immigrations are often first seen in schools (Gebeloff, Evans, & Scheinkman, 2013). Students are very different in the ways they learn, process, organize, and react (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009). Diversity is not simply a United States phenomenon as globally classrooms are becoming more diverse (Hafernik & Wiant, 2012).

There are multiple forms of diversity. A recent study analyzing the countries of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and the United States of America explored areas where there seemed to be a gap within the literature surrounding diversity in areas including gender, race, and socioeconomic status or class (Bhopal & Maylor, 2013). The authors found that many institutional structures reinforced educational inequality on the basis of these areas.

Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) discussed how diversity within schools may create challenges for teachers in meeting the needs of all of their students. Some of these challenges may be met though differentiated instruction as it “offers a framework for addressing learner variance as a critical component of instructional planning” (p. 2). By using teaching techniques such as differentiated instruction, the needs of all individual students may be met.

Differentiated Instruction

In an effort to support learning in classrooms, different methodologies and differentiated instruction must be employed that allow for students to have reflective practice as well as move into higher levels of learning and thinking. The term, differentiated instruction, means that the teacher is able to “recognize students’ varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests; and to act responsively” thus using it as a way to teach students in the same classroom at varying levels in ability maximizing every student’s education by “meeting each student where he or she is and assisting in the learning process” (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009, p. 3). Teachers are struggling to find ways to meet the needs of all of their students while still teaching the required content. Teachers want to find ways that acknowledge how “meaning and understanding can both emanate from and frame content standards so that young people develop powers of mind as well as accumulate an information base” (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 1).

The concept of differentiated instruction has recently seen resurgence in the literature but is not a new concept. The ideas found within differentiated instruction are based in the writings of Vygotsky (1978). Differentiated instruction begins with the concept that all children can learn but may do so differently. Vygotsky believed that all children can learn by beginning with their current knowledge and abilities, with necessary guidance, until they are able to develop to the point of doing a certain task or understanding a concept without assistance. He called this gap between what students can do with assistance and where they can do it independently as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It is in the ZPD that students are most able to learn. By using differentiated instructional techniques in the ZPD, teachers can help students to grow. According to Subban (2006), the role of the teacher “. . . becomes one of purposeful instruction,

a mediator of activities and substantial experiences allowing the learner to attain his or her zone of proximal development” (p. 937).

There are three aspects of differentiated instruction: the content, the process, and the product (Tomlinson, 2001). The content is what the teacher plans to teach. The content is encompassed by curriculum, standards, objectives, goals, and additional sources. The process is the way the teacher teaches. What concepts of pedagogy does the teacher employ? Classroom management techniques can also have a strong impact on the process. Pedagogy examines groupings such as small group, partnering, whole class, or individual grouping. The product is what is produced by the student. This addresses how the student is evaluated and demonstrates the level of cognition and understanding of the content (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2009).

There is a global call for using more creativity and collaboration within the classroom. Sahlberg (2010) wrote,

Schools and other educational institutions should cultivate attitudes, cultures, and skills needed within creative and collaborative learning environments. Creativity will not flourish and be sustained in schools unless people feel secure to take risks and explore the unknown. Moreover, working with and understanding innovation requires creative and risk-intensive contexts. In brief, a sustainable learning society that also helps us all to understand how to retain our planet’s ecosystem in sustainable balance can be best promoted by developing safe and caring schools and thereby combat declining social capital and increasing the structural indifference in many Western societies. (p. 59)

Through the use of more creative, differentiated instructional techniques, the needs of all students can be met (Subban, 2006). By responding to the diverse student needs in the classroom,

teachers have the ability to expand the creation of new learning for students by allowing them the opportunities to experience learning through social and collaborative means (Hall, 2002).

Arts-Based Educational Inquiry

Universally, there is a cry for a way of education that allows creativity, freedom of expression, and a new medium of expression (Speiser, 2007). The answer to this call may be found in arts-based educational inquiry. Daykin (2004) indicated that the interest in arts-based educational inquiry has expanded in recent years. Defining arts-based educational inquiry has proven to be a difficult task. There seems to be no universally accepted definition (Diamond & Mullen, 1999). There are varying definitions of arts-based educational inquiry. For the purpose of this paper, the definition provided by McNiff (in Speiser, 2007) is used. He stated that arts-based educational inquiry is “a method of inquiry that uses the elements of the creative arts experience . . . as ways of understanding the significance of what we do within our practice and teaching” (p. 1). Moreover, the focus will be on understanding, appreciating and valuing arts-based educational inquiry.

Arts-based educational inquiry is the ability to express research in different, possibly more creative forms. “The aim in arts-based research is to use the arts as a method, a form of analysis, a subject, or all of the above, within qualitative research . . . (Huss & Cwikel, 2005, p. 2). There are many methods of arts-based inquiry. These methods include: metaphor, fable, music, literature, poetry, personal narrative, storytelling, short stories, timelines, drama, sculpture and painting. However, this is not an exhaustive list. What is identified as art continues to evolve and expand (Diamond & Mullen, 1999). For example, Vaughn (2005) listed several features that flow through arts-based educational inquiry. These features included:

- Establishment of a virtual reality;
- Existence of doubt;

- Use of significant language;
- Use of related and vernacular language;
- Endorsement of empathy;
- Personal signature of the researcher;
- Occurrence of aesthetics.

Although, the medium used in this type of research is different than the traditional types of accepted methodologies, the fundamental basis remains the same. Daykin (2004) stated:

A review of arts-based methodologies . . . suggests that while creative writing, visual arts, film, photography, video, and theatre-based performance are increasingly being used and evaluated in different research contexts, the use of arts that have neither a literary nor a visual basis is rare. (p. 2)

The literature is still the foundation upon which the arts-based inquiry is built. Art for art sake is not enough; the literature must also be present (Eisner & Powell, 2002). Dewey (1934) addressed literature and art as follows:

Literature thus presents evidence, more convincing perhaps than that offered by the other arts, that art is fine when it draws upon the material of other experiences and expresses their material in a medium which intensifies and clarifies its energy through the order that supervenes. The arts accomplish this result not by self-conscious intention but in the very operation of creating, by means of new objects, new modes of experience. Every art communicates because it expresses. It enables us to share vividly and deeply in meanings to which we had been dumb, or for which we had but the ear that permits what is said to pass through in transit to overt action. (p. 244)

Diamond & Van Halen-Farber (2002) also expound upon the idea that arts-based educational inquiry must also be based within the literature, “. . . as arts-based inquirers, we do not abandon literature; nor do we abrogate the place of art in (or nonscientific forms of) educational research” (p. 123).

Literature is the building block on which all inquiry is first founded and then built upon. “

The springboard from which arts-based educational inquiry emerged was truly the work of John Dewey (Eisner, 1991). When Dewey was invited to give a series of lectures one year at Harvard University, he selected the topic of art and art history. Those lectures eventually were brought together to become his book *Art as Experience* (Eisner, 1991). In this book Dewey argued that art was

. . . not the sole possession of a unique class of objects hung in museums, but a living process that humans experienced when a certain quality of attentiveness and emotion were a part of the engagement. This process is prefigured in the focused and taut attention of an animal stalking its prey and in the utter absorption of a toddler playing with sand. It appears in the work of a gardener devoted to the care of plants and is displayed by the amateur mechanic who lovingly ministers to a car (Eisner & Powell, 2002, p. 133).

Arts-based Educational Inquiry in the Classroom as a Teaching Methodology

Arts-based educational inquiry can be used in any classroom at any level. Currently, it is being most widely used in the elementary classrooms (Huss & Cwikel, 2005). Eisner & Powell (2002) conducted a study of the impact of art on the sciences. In this study, the authors used the foundation that established John Dewey’s aesthetics. “Dewey held the view that art is a particular quality of human experience that to some degree could be present in any interaction an individual had with the world” (Huss & Cwikel, 2005, p. 133). By building upon this idea, they discovered that art was to be found in science and science was to be found in art. Slattery & Langerock (2002) also

found a common bond between the arts and sciences by proposing that, “synthetical moments – experiences of profound insight that merge time, space, and self in a seamless transhistorical moment – in the arts and sciences are not as easily discernible and clearly categorized . . .” (p. 350).

While there are many similarities between art and science, Diamond and Mullen (1999) cite the differences between the two. The first difference is that art is self-consciously shaped. The second and more prominent difference deals with the medium of expression. Dewey (1954) stated:

Science states meanings; art expresses them. Statement sets forth the conditions under which an experience of an object or situation may be had . . . The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, aesthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one. (p. 38)

In their book, *The Postmodern Educator: Arts-Based Inquiries and Teacher Development* Diamond and Mullen (1999) examined the rationale for using arts-based educational inquiry in the classroom. Slattery and Langerock (2002) stated that by using arts-based educational inquiry in schools, “. . . we advance the notion that artistic modes of thought and aesthetic experiences are essential to the cognitive and expressive development of students and to the quality of the instructional milieu orchestrated by teachers” (p. 349). Van Halen-Farber and Diamond (2002) used a damask fabric to illustrate the intertwining of science and art. They discussed the silk worm’s cocoon and how when it is unwound it is one long strand of silk. This strand of silk is then woven with other strands of silk to create a silk thread. The thread is then woven into a damask fabric. There are many variances within damask that can only be seen in a reflection of light. When the fabric is on one side, there are shiny and dull parts, when the fabric is then flipped over, there is a negative of the first side; the dull parts are shiny and the shiny parts are

dull. This illustration depicts the relationship between science and art. They are both interdependent upon one another, complement each other and both require reflection.

Arts-based educational inquiry is the culminating experience of the quest for the student. This type of methodology gives opportunity for the student to use creative measures of expression as a legitimate form of inquiry. It takes away the typical paper format as the concluding experience and allows the flow of free thinking or out-of-the-box thinking at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Inquiry is still grounded in literature, but the outputs can come in various forms. In arts-based educational inquiry, the only limit is the student's (or possibly the teacher's) imagination. It is through these outputs that new and different ideas, concepts, and beliefs may flourish.

The Jenlink Poetic

One such way of stretching practice to include these aspects of differentiated instruction and arts-based educational inquiry is through the use of the Jenlink poetic. The Jenlink poetic, named for its creator, Dr. Patrick Jenlink, is a way to explore and analyze a single aspect through multiple lenses thus providing a multifaceted examination. The Jenlink poetic is "specifically intended to facilitate a learning experience for all students" (Dam & Cowart, 2011, ix).

Based on the works of Aristotle, Jenlink originally developed his concept of the poetic, as a way for his doctoral students to explore the concept of the term *scholar-practitioner* (Jenlink, 2008). He used the poetic as a way for the students to build meaning into a new and somewhat abstract concept. The four lenses that the students used to analyze the concept of a scholar-practitioner were through four different mediums. These mediums included: film or cinema, metaphor, poetry, and literature. Jenlink grounded this theory in the writings of *Poetics* (Aristotle, circa 350 B. C.) and *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1934). Jenlink expounded upon the concept of the poetic by stating that the poetic may serve to ". . . illuminate the experiences of

learning within the social and political contexts of education” (Jenlink, 2008, p. 8).

Creating the Jenlink Poetic

The Jenlink Poetic alters slightly from the concept of the Poetic first introduced by Jenlink. In Jenlink’s initial work, the Poetic used a meshing of the four mediums of literature, film or cinema, metaphor, and poetry to portray the abstract concept of the scholar-practitioner. Currently, within university classrooms and secondary classrooms, the Jenlink poetic is being used to assist students with understanding abstract concepts (Fredrickson, McMahan, & Dunlap, 2012). The Jenlink poetic consists of film and literature as found in Jenlink’s original work. The use of poetry was altered by using music. This was added because the faculty using the Jenlink poetic believed that music was “a type of expressive language similar to poetry” and that it was a “form of poetry to which students were already integrally meshed” (Fredrickson, Dunlap, and McMahan, 2011, p. 249). A second departure from the original poetic was a more dramatic change, as it took away the concept of the metaphor and replaced it with television. The teachers employed this instructional strategy because they were “looking for an art form which would contribute to the poetic’s effectiveness when used with instructors of all grade levels” (p. 249).

Using the Jenlink Poetic as an Instructional Tool

As with other arts-based educational inquiry methods, the Jenlink poetic can be used as a differentiated instructional technique that could be helpful in assisting students in reaching conclusions, assumptions, and deductions at higher levels of learning in international educational contexts. Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy “broadens the opportunities for critical and creative thinking” (Gregory & Chapman, 2013, p. 141). Anderson and Krathwoh (2001) expand upon the ideas presented in each of the levels of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy:

- Remembering: Basic recall or recognizing information, memorization;

- Understanding: Building meaning based on information presented, summarizing, explaining;
- Applying: Manipulating the information, only one correct answer;
- Analyzing: Breaking down the material, manipulating the material, multiple correct answers or approaches;
- Evaluating: Making an informed judgment, more than just an opinion;
- Creating: Making something original based on previous knowledge gained, building meaning through expression.

The concept of creating is at the highest level of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Instructional techniques that employ elements of creativity have the capacity to take students to higher levels of learning and understanding. Creativity is a fundamental outcome in all arts-based educational inquiries. So, by their very nature, they are meeting the highest levels of learning.

Conclusions

Globally, classrooms are changing and becoming more diverse. As the student demographics of classrooms change, the teaching methodologies of the teachers have to be dynamic as well. This article served as a critical personal narrative analysis examining arts-based educational inquiries as they intersected with these issues. Additionally, it postulated that through the use of differentiated instructional techniques, teachers would be more adept at meeting the challenges on a global basis. Arts-based educational inquiry has been shown to be a way to assist teachers as they work to meet the needs of all students. Building upon the concept of arts-based educational inquiry, this article suggested that an instructional technique, such as the Jenlink poetic, is a way for teachers to use an arts-based educational inquiry method while engaging their students in the creative process of thinking, learning, and exploring at higher levels.

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