

An Action Research Study on Using Elegant Tasks for Primary One Pupils to Learn Art

SAGE Open
July-September 2014: 1–25
© The Author(s) 2014
DOI: 10.1177/2158244014549743
sgo.sagepub.com


Fiona Shir Pei Poh-Lim¹

Abstract

This action research study explored the use of Elegant Tasks for 30 Primary One pupils from a typical public school in Singapore to learn art. According to Sandra Kay, an Elegant Task is an open-ended-problem approach that serves to elicit “creative thoughts” and “elegant” or “aesthetically meaningful” solutions from pupils. Apart from making the teaching of art interesting, the use of Elegant Tasks helps to amuse the pupils into developing an awareness of his or her own style of thinking including its strong points as well as its weaknesses. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions. The findings from this study showed that pupils like the adoption of Elegant Tasks in their art lessons as they were given enough room to explore materials, make new discoveries, and work collaboratively in groups. Besides, this approach has also developed a strong sense of ownership and pride in their artworks as witnessed from pupils’ presentation of their artworks at the end of each Elegant Task topic.

Keywords

visual arts, humanities, arts and humanities, curriculum, education, social sciences, education theory and practice, educational research, teaching

Introduction

I have been a primary school art teacher for many years. Prior to this research study, I taught art to my pupils in the same manner that I was taught this subject when I was a primary school pupil. The strategy that I had adopted all these years was a teacher-centered, product-driven approach in which I provided all the required information, instructions, demonstrations, samples and followed by my pupils’ production of artworks. Hence, my pupils learnt art merely through imitating the samples that I had prepared prior to the lessons.

However, as witnessed in the past art lessons, pupils listened passively to me while I imparted my knowledge. Although the majority of pupils were able to produce impressive and eye-catching artworks by imitating my styles, colors, and methods shown in the samples, I found that their artworks lacked creativity, imagination, emotion, and personal voices. In addition, they neither demonstrated ownership of nor pride in their artworks. I also observed that over time, most of my pupils became disengaged during the art lessons as they were not required to actively participate in the process of ideation and art-making. A few of them even became restless and caused unwanted disruptions in class.

These observations of my pupils’ lack of interest in learning art and the disruptive behaviors of some of them raised concern and this in turn led me to reflect on and question my

own instructional strategies in class. I had asked myself why I was still using the one-mould-fits-all strategy to teach the children despite my cognizance that all children are different, and they love to express themselves and to learn new drawing techniques and skills from their art teachers. I had also asked myself whether there was a better way to teach art as well as to nurture a child’s creative development. This soul searching gave rise to the conviction that there must be better ways to teach art and to develop the artist within each child. Fueled by this conviction, I decided to embark on this action research journey with a view of exploring a pupil-centered pedagogy that can offer a beneficial impact on teaching art.

This research study was conducted through a series of five action research cycles with each cycle that alternated between action and critical reflection. As pointed by Dick (2001), action research is both a change methodology and a research methodology within a single process. In this research study, action research has helped to bring about change or improvement (the action) in such a way that better

¹Ngee Ann Primary School, Singapore

Corresponding Author:

Fiona Shir Pei Poh-Lim, Ngee Ann Primary School, 344 Marine Terrace, Singapore 449149, Singapore.
Email: poh-lim_shir_pei@moe.edu.sg



understanding was developed as parallel outcome at hand. Action research also assisted the teacher to pursue understanding (the research) that allowed the action to be based on a better understanding of the current situation and the research was achieved by being responsive to the situation and by searching strenuously for disconfirming evidence.

Action Research Cycle 1: Derivation of Research Questions

While searching for a pupil-centered pedagogy, I was introduced to “Elegant Task” approach by one of the officers from STAR (Singapore Teachers’ Academy for the aRTs) during an art workshop in February 2013. During the workshop, I learnt ways of designing art lessons that focused on pupils’ creativity and imagination using Elegant Task. This approach also allows pupils to explore materials and participate actively in the art-making process. After learning about this new approach, I was eager to find an opportunity to try it out on my pupils.

During my first consultation session with STAR officers in May 2013 for my action research study project, we brainstormed a few possible pupil-centered methodologies suitable to be used for this study, such as inquiry-based approach, experiential learning approach, and Elegant Task approach. After debating on the pros and cons of each method, we came to a unanimous consensus that Elegant Task approach was more suitable for this study as it was a relatively new approach which had not been used or tested in a primary school in Singapore before and it also fulfilled the criteria of being a pupil-centric, process-driven approach that could develop pupils’ creativity and imagination. By using Elegant Tasks to teach art, my pupils would have opportunities to make choices and decisions in the ideation stage and during the art-making process. The choice of using Elegant Tasks was subsequently adopted for my art lessons, and simultaneously I embarked on my research project. Hence, for the research, the broad question that my study addressed was as follows: “What are the Primary One pupils’ perceptions on the use of Elegant Tasks in art lessons?”

Beside the broad research question, we also crafted six specific questions to guide my inquiry and to enable me to collect data to answer the broad research question. The STAR officers helped me to scope my research area into three broad themes, first, we wanted to find out whether the pupils liked the Elegant Task approach; second, we wanted to find out what pupils actually learned if I use Elegant Task approach in art lessons; and last, we wanted to find out whether Elegant Task approach helped the pupils to produce quality artworks. With these three themes in mind, we further broke down each theme into six manageable bite-size questions. These six specific questions were later used during the focus group discussions to collect data.

The six specific questions were as follows:

1. Do the pupils like the Elegant Tasks approach to learning art and doing artwork? If yes/no, why?
2. Give an example of an Elegant Task art lesson which the pupils liked and disliked. Which parts of the lessons do they like/dislike and why do they like/dislike those parts?
3. What can the pupils learn about art-making when Elegant Tasks are deployed?
4. Apart from art-making, what else can the pupils learn during the Elegant Task Art lessons?
5. Can the Elegant Task approach help the pupils to produce quality artworks? If yes, in what ways? If no, why?
6. What else can be done to enhance the art lessons? Can the lessons be improved based on pupils’ feedback at the end of each Elegant Task?

Action Research Cycle 2: Conduct Literature Review

In this action research cycle, the findings of literature review are presented in three different sections. The first section, “The 2009 Primary and Lower Secondary Art Syllabus and Its Influence on the Teaching of Art,” describes the syllabus set by authority. The second section, “Elegant Tasks, Its Characteristics, and Its Effect,” describes an Elegant Task and how an Elegant Task can meet the learning objectives mentioned in the first section. The third section, “Understanding the Different Types of Learning Dimensions in Learners and Their Stages of Artistic Development,” provides a set of pointers for designing a lesson using an Elegant Task.

The 2009 Primary and Lower Secondary Art Syllabus and Its Influence on the Teaching of Art

In Singapore, art is deemed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) as an important subject through which pupils at all educational levels can be equipped with the 21st-century competencies and be holistically prepared for successful adult life. This is seen in the recent move by the MOE to strengthen aesthetic education (MOE, 2010). Its revised 2009 Primary and Lower Secondary Art Syllabuses recommended that the primary schools’ planning of their Art Instructional Program should be guided by six principles, namely, “learner-centered,” “process-oriented,” “contextualized,” “interactive,” “initiative-related,” and “fun” to fulfill seven objectives, among which are (a) “create artworks to share their ideas, thoughts and feelings,” (b) “cultivate a spirit of innovation and experimentation,” and (c) “develop sensory awareness and imagination” (MOE, 2008, pp. 3, 7). The implementation of the guiding principles for planning the Instructional Program and the objectives spelt out in the revised 2009 Primary and Lower Secondary Art Syllabus

was concretized in 2010 when MOE moved to strengthen art education.

The learning outcomes for the Primary One and Two pupils are spelt out in the 2009 Art Syllabus as follows:

1. Identify simple visual qualities in what they see around them
2. Be curious about what they see
3. Share their imagination, thoughts and feelings through art making
4. Wide use of art materials and medium
5. Enjoy looking at and creating art
6. Talk about what they see and experience. (MOE, 2008, p. 5)

These learning outcomes, which are derived from the objectives and the framework of “Seeing,” “Expressing,” and “Appreciating” in the Art Syllabus, will allow the students to “observe their environment, generate ideas, create artworks, discuss about art and value the role of art in society” (MOE, 2008). In short, art education in Singapore aims to enable every student to be visually literate and to appreciate art.

Elegant Task, Its Characteristics, and Its Effect

Teaching for creative development necessitates designing lessons that allow learners to perceive, select, and explore, through their own lenses, all the possible visual solutions to the problem (Kay, 1998). In short, teaching of art needs to be pupil-centric and process-driven so as to develop the creativity and imagination of learners. For this study, I had adopted the Elegant Task approach for my art lessons. The concept of Elegant Task originated from Sandra Kay (1998) who defined it as an open-ended problem that will elicit “creative thoughts” and “elegant” or “aesthetically meaningful” solutions from pupils. According to Kay, an Elegant Task is one that is worth solving, is studio based, and contains forced choices and constraints, and the level of the Elegant Task, which ranged from “beginner” to “independent,” is determined by the degree the choices and constraints co-vary (Sukaimi, 2013).

Therefore, in setting Elegant Tasks, the art teacher should select problems that are relevant to the experiences of the pupils for them to be able to relate to and to find them worth solving. The elegant problem should also be sufficiently flexible for all educational levels and all categories of pupils to adapt it for their own use (flexibility); will allow many possible, creative, and original solutions as it is open-ended (fluency); and should also be studio based (Kay, 1998).

It is envisaged that setting such elegant problems will empower the pupils to make choices and meaningful

decisions in the ideation and art-making process, will enhance their technical and intellectual growth, and encourage them to discover and explore the attributes and characteristics of the materials in greater depth, thereby leading to other extraordinary forms of the craft (elaboration; Sukaimi, 2013). An elegant problem will improve the pupils’ engagement in the task as it will evoke reflection, decision-making, and meaning-making which are processes for deriving original and creative solutions (originality). Pupils will intuitively feel a sense of ownership and pride when the art-making experience is meaningful and satisfying (Sukaimi, 2013). According to Sukaimi (2013), by designing tasks that invite flexibility, fluency, elaboration, and originality of responses, the teacher is engaging his/her pupils in the creative thought process.

The way the teacher shapes an Elegant Task can affect what and how her pupils learn. Kay (1998) says,

Visual problems that are challenging and can be solved successfully by diverse learners have more than one answer. This takes practice on the part of a teacher and a willingness to establish criteria and parameters that allow for individualism. Designing elegant problems takes thoughtful practice. (p. 331)

Thus, Elegant Task approach is chosen for my research study as it best fits the 2009 Art Syllabus set by MOE. During the study, pupils were given opportunities to identify visual qualities they see around them during the tuning-in activity, arouse their curiosity through guiding questions during the exploration and the discovery stages, and express their inner thoughts, feelings, and imagination through different medium during the art-making process.

Different Types of Learning Dimensions in Learners and Their Stages of Artistic Development

According to Kay (1998), “Elegant Tasks” is grounded in theories which are consistent with other theoretical works. Among these are the different types of learning dimensions which affect the pupils’ learning of art. The learning dimensions are categorized as affective, social, and cognitive and are elaborated below.

The affective dimension of learning is described in Csikszentmihalyi’s “flow construct” motivational theory in which he suggests that learning will be intrinsically motivating when a problem is pitched at an appropriate level of difficulty for the pupil (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). That is, the task set by the art teacher must be within the pupils’ current ability level to handle for it to be appealing to them. If it is beyond or below their ability, then they will experience anxiety or boredom accordingly when handling the task. Learning will occur when the pupils find the task assigned by the art teacher intrinsically motivating and can handle it (Kay, 1998).

The social dimensions of learning are grounded in Vygotsky's theory of intellectual development. Vygotsky (1978) believed that "cognitive development originated from social interaction" before knowledge is internalized and the "capability to learn under a teacher's guidance varies tremendously in children with equal levels of mental development (pg. 33)." Vygotsky terms this "area of fluctuation" in developmental level as the "zone of proximal development (ZPD)" and views "good learning" as "that which is in advance of development." ZPD is the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, pg. 33). Based on this theory, art tasks must be pitched at a higher level than the pupils' current level of problem-solving skill (Kay, 1998).

The cognitive dimensions of learning are premised on the differences in cognitive development among individuals in artistic problem solving. Arnheim (1974) "suggests that the imagination necessary to engage in artistic problem solving requires abstract thought" (as cited in Kay, 1998, pg. 264). Kay (1998) therefore advocated that art teachers need to first understand the cognitive processes associated with thinking in art if they are to systematically develop abstract thought in their pupils. According to her, pupils respond to an assignment or problem differently. They used problem-solving strategies that required thinking when handling the assignment or problem. Their choice of problem-solving strategies is influenced by their prior experience and whether the assignment/problem is close- or open-ended in nature (Kay, 1998). That is, the level of the students' expertise in the subject matter affects their perception and interpretations of the assignment/problem and influences the approach they used to perform the assignment or to solve the problem. The higher the level of expertise, the more advanced is the product of their work (Kay, 1998).

On the other hand, understanding the stages of artistic development in children can also aid the art teacher to plan and execute lessons effectively. Lowenfeld (1947) argues that there are six defined *stages of artistic development* in children and that these stages can be witnessed in their artworks. The six stages are as follows: Scribble Stage (1-3 years old), Preschematic Stage (3-4 years old), Schematic Stage (5-6 years old), Dawning Realism Stage (7-9 years old), Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage (10-13 years old), and lastly Decision Stage (13-16 years old). As my Primary One pupils are between the ages of 6 to 7, majority of them are progressing from the Schematic Stage to the Dawning Realism Stage as observed in their artworks. Thus, during the study, the four Elegant Task unit topics were designed to pitch at the Dawning Realism Stage whereby pupils were required to use more complex schema when conceptualizing and creating their artworks.

Hence, to design meaningful assignments/problems for optimal engagement and learning in pupils, the art teacher

needs to know the different types of learning dimensions in learners and the stage of artistic development the pupils are at so as to set the tasks to be done in art accordingly. By paying attention to the affective and social dimensions of learning, the art teacher could empower the pupils to take ownership of their learning while being cognizant of the cognitive dimensions of learning which "can enhance the learning of a novice or assist the non-artist's appreciation of the complexity of thought in producing ideas in art" (Kay, 1998, pg. 266).

In summary, I have summarized the above literature review of different types of learning dimensions in learners as follows:

- Point a: Task must be within the pupil's ability
- Point b: Opportunity for independent problem solving
- Point c: Collaboration with more capable peers
- Point d: Choice of problem-solving strategy

Action Research Cycle 3: My Intervention in Class

The study commenced in May 2013 and ended in September 2013. However, the research project spanned a total of 10 months from conception to completion of the written research report.

Selection of Participants

The sample for this research study comprised a class of 30 Primary One pupils, who were 7 year old from a typical public primary school. This class was a multi-ethnic class with mixed-ability and mixed-gender. Table 1 below shows the distribution of pupils by ethnicity, academic grouping, and gender. There were 13 girls and 17 boys, of whom 8 were high-progress pupils, 14 middle-progress, and 8 low-progress pupils.

Primary One pupils were selected for this research study as they were fresh from Kindergarten and had not gone through any formal primary school art education yet. There were no previous primary school art experiences to influence their views.

Elegant Task Lessons

Four unit topics totaling 11 Elegant Task lessons were carried out with the pupils who participated in this study. These unit topics were (a) Color Theory, (b) Drawing From Observation, (c) Fold and Dye, and (d) Printmaking. Refer to Appendices A to D for the detailed lesson plans. I have used the Color Theory lesson plan (Appendix A) as an example on how I have linked the Literature Review to my lesson plan by incorporating the Points (a, b, c, and d) as highlighted in this Action Research Cycle 2. In addition, I have also added three new points here as my own initiative to value-add and to

Table 1. Distribution of Students by Ethnicity, Academic Grouping, and Gender.

Ethnicity	Students' academic grouping						Total
	High progress		Middle progress		Low progress		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Chinese	2	6	7	2	2	2	21
Indian	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Malay	0	0	0	2	2	0	4
Others	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total	2	6	9	5	6	2	30

enhance my pupils' engagement in the art lessons. The three new points are as follows:

- Point e: Pupils' safety
- Point f: Group discussion
- Point g: Class presentation

Pupils' safety is very important during art lessons. I always make sure that my pupils are not allowed to handle sharp objects that would compromise their safety. Teacher's supervision is necessary when pupils are exploring art medium and materials. Group discussions are also added into each unit topic as pupils could also learn from their peers when they talked among themselves in their own language. To conclude each unit topic, I have added in the class presentation segment to create opportunity for pupils to share and talk about their feelings, experiences, thoughts, and ideas before, during, and after the art-making process.

The 11 Elegant Task lessons were conducted between May 2013 and September 2013. The pupils had their conventional (teacher-centered) art lessons from January 2013 to April 2013 before the commencement of this research study.

Color Theory was covered over 2 weeks while the lessons on Drawing From Observation, Fold and Dye, and Printmaking took 3 weeks each to complete. The last two units focused on concepts and skills. The pupils had two periods of art lessons per week. Each period was half an hour long. All the lessons were conducted in the classroom.

Table 2 below shows the number of lessons, what the teacher did, what the pupils learnt, and the Elegant Tasks by unit topic.

For Unit Topic 1, Color Theory, the data collected from the two lessons were not used for this study as the pupils studied this topic twice, once via the conventional way and the second time using the Elegant Task way. However, the latter lessons served as a time for training and hand-holding the pupils to learn art via Elegant Task. Two lessons were used to introduce pupils to Elegant Tasks.

During the three lessons in Unit Topic 2, Drawing From Observation, the pupils did different art activities. In Lesson 1, they shared what a house meant to them personally,

discussed about some unique houses found around the world, played with the building blocks, and attempted to build their dream house for the first time. In Lesson 2, they confirmed their designs after several attempts and sketched these in their respective sketch books. In Lesson 3, they colored their sketches and presented their designs to their group members. Finally, a few pupils were selected by the teacher to present their dream houses to the whole class.

In Unit Topic 3, Fold and Dye, the art-making activities progressed from simple to complex tasks. During the first lesson, the teacher introduced the Fold and Dye technique. After that, each pupil was given five small pieces of rice paper to explore the technique. They then pasted their completed work in their sketchbook as part of their learning process before sharing their best piece of artwork with their group members in the next lesson. In Lesson 3, the pupils did fold and dye on a desk-size piece of rice paper. By this lesson, each pupil would have decided on how they wanted to fold their paper. When all the students had completed their artwork, they stood in a big circle to appreciate each other's handiwork. A few students who had not presented before were chosen to present their artwork to the whole class.

For the Unit Topic 4 on Printmaking, three lessons were conducted. In Lesson 1, after the teacher had taught the printmaking technique, each group chose one fruit or vegetable to explore four different ways of cutting and printing it. The pupils in each group discussed which way they wanted to cut the fruit or vegetable. After they had discussed and decided, I would then cut the fruit or vegetable for them as pupils at this age are not allowed to handle a knife. After each cut, pupils printed the fruit or vegetable on their individual worksheet. At the end of Lesson 1, the pupils pasted their prints in their sketchbook. They presented their group findings to the whole class during Lesson 2. They taught their classmates how to cut the fruit or vegetable to achieve certain unique shape when printed. There was interaction between the group doing the presentation and their classmates seated on the floor. Some pupils even suggested other ways of cutting the fruit or vegetable after the group had presented. In Lesson 3, guided by the Elegant Task, the pupils used the given fruit, vegetables, and other textured materials to create their

Table 2. Descriptions of the Four Elegant Task Art Lessons.

Unit topic	Number of lessons	What the teacher did	What the pupils learned	Elegant task for art-making
Color Theory	Two lessons spread over 2 weeks	Being a repeat lesson, the teacher used the time to teach the pupils what Elegant Task is and how to solve problems	Pupils learned about primary and secondary colors and discovered for themselves which two primary colors mixed together to produce a secondary color (Point a, b, f and g)	Mothers' Day is coming! You want to design a very special Mothers' Day card for your mother. Draw a portrait of your mother on the card and outline it with black permanent marker. Cover the whole card with yellow, red, and blue colored tissue paper. Use only water and brush to paste the tissue paper on the card. Give the completed card to your mother to surprise her on Mothers' Day
Drawing from Observation	Three lessons spread over 3 weeks	The teacher showed pupils some unique houses found around the world and discussed about the structures, functionality, and aesthetic values of the houses. The teacher also asked pupils to think what a house meant to them	Pupils learned about sketching building blocks from observation. They discovered that to make their sketches more realistic, they had to include the side view as well (Point a, b, c, d, f, and g)	You have a piece of land. You want to design and build a house for you and your family to live happily in. Create your house using six building blocks and sketch it onto the sketch book using pencil. Color it with colored pencils. Consider each family member's likes and dislikes and build a house to surprise them
Fold and Dye	Three lessons spread over 3 weeks	The teacher taught the Fold and Dye technique in Lesson 1 followed by self-discovery and exploration time for the pupils	Pupils learned the technique of folding and dyeing paper. They discovered that when they opened their folded paper, repeated patterns were created. Thus, this led them to discover that different kinds of folding would produce different kinds of repeated patterns (Point a, b, c, d, f, and g)	Your school has bought plastic covers for all pupils to protect their desks. Your principal wants all the pupils to decorate their desks beautifully. You are given a piece of white rice paper to decorate your desk. Using the Fold and Dye method, fold your rice paper no more than 6 times and dye it with batik dyes to achieve your desired repeated patterns. Decorate your table proudly with your new rice paper once you have finished
Printmaking	Three lessons spread over 3 weeks	In Lesson 1, the teacher taught the pupils the printmaking technique followed by self-discovery and exploration time for the pupils	Pupils learned the printmaking technique. They discovered that if they cut the fruits or vegetables from another angle, they would end up getting a unique shape when printed. They also discovered that materials have textures and the rougher it is, the better the print will turn out (Point a, b, c, d, e, f, and g)	You have spent almost a year now in Ngee Ann Primary School since you left kindergarten. Imagine that next year, you will buddy a new batch of Primary One pupils! What would you say to your new buddy about the best moment/event you had in Ngee Ann Primary School since January this year? Capture this memorable moment/event using the Printmaking technique. Ink your object with water-proof paint using a brush and print it by hand-pressure. You may also use other objects found around you. Be creative and have fun!

individual print. A few pupils were then selected to present their prints to the whole class near the end of the lesson.

Action Research Cycle 4: Data Analysis

Data Collection and Instrumentation

As this research was a qualitative study, data were collected via focus group discussions. Refer to Appendix E for the list of focus group discussion questions. Five focus group discussions of six pupils per group were conducted to gather

data on their perception of using Elegant Tasks to learn art and doing artworks. The questions for the focus group discussions were patterned after the six specific questions. They covered the three themes of pupils' reactions to the use of Elegant Tasks to learn art, what they had learnt in the Elegant Task Art lessons, and how the use of the Elegant Task approach helped them to improve their artworks.

As the Primary One pupils were still very young, being only 6 to 7 years of age, the size of each focus group discussion was kept small to avoid their being easily swayed by the views of their classmates. Also to help them to overcome

inhibitions during the discussions, the pupils answered an open-ended questionnaire patterned after the six specific questions prior to the focus group discussions so that they could speak up at the discussion sessions. I was the facilitator for all the focus group discussions and another teacher assisted in note-taking. The focus group discussion sessions were also video recorded.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the focus group discussions were then compiled based on the three themes identified. The three themes were as follows: the pupils' reactions to the use of Elegant Tasks in art lessons, what the pupils learnt through the Elegant Task Art lessons, and ways the Elegant Task Art lessons enabled the pupils to produce quality artwork. The three themes were used to narrate the data on the pupils' perceptions on the use of Elegant Task to learn art.

Questions 1 and 2: Pupils' Reactions to the Use of Elegant Tasks in Art Lessons

The pupils' reactions to the use of Elegant Tasks in art lessons were very positive, favorable, and encouraging. To the pupils, the Elegant Task lessons were "exciting," "fun" with "a lot of interesting activities to do," and "cool and amazing." They not only "got to play with their friends when doing art" but they also learned "new things," "a lot of new techniques," and "new skills." They found learning meaningful because they understood the reasons for doing their artworks, and they could do them "creatively" as exemplified by this remark, "No right answers. We can do our own art creatively." Besides providing opportunities for them to play and learn, the use of Elegant Tasks also helped them to improve their art as they could draw and paint better compared with the artworks done before the research study. The pupils were highly motivated by the use of Elegant Tasks to learn art as seen from these responses of the students: "I can't wait for Thursdays to have art lesson. I am happy when it is Thursday"; "It is better than normal art lesson"; "The lessons are great and I love them all"; and "It is exciting, interesting, and fun. I look forward to [the] art lesson. Although it is at the last 2 periods but I am not tired at all. I'm excited when [the art teacher] comes in."

In terms of the four unit lessons, the most popular lesson with the pupils was Fold and Dye. In their words, it was "fun," "exciting," and "interesting." The pupils liked different parts of the Fold and Dye lessons. Some liked the painting part, some like the dyeing part, and others like the folding and opening of the rice paper. The painting and dyeing appealed to the pupils because they liked to paint and create different designs and patterns. The opening of the rice paper was thrilling for the pupils as they excitedly anticipated seeing the patterns they had created. These feelings are summarized by a pupil when he said,

I like the Fold and Dye because it is interesting. I like the opening part because it is exciting to see what the final artwork look like. When I'm painting the patterns, I don't know how it will look like until I open it.

The least popular topic was Drawing From Observation. Only two pupils voted for this topic. One of them liked to draw the blocks while the other liked to color the blocks using different tones to make them look three dimensional. Most pupils mentioned that the sketching part was the toughest as this could be that they have not grasped the concept and skill of three dimensional drawing.

The pupils also strongly approved the use of Elegant Tasks to teach art. Personally, they wanted more lessons using Elegant Tasks. In the words of one pupil which was echoed by many of his/her classmates, "I want every art lesson to be Elegant Task. It is so fun." Eleven art lessons using Elegant Tasks were not sufficient for them. They wanted more of such lessons. Besides thinking of themselves, they also wanted all the Primary One classes to have the opportunity to learn art using Elegant Tasks. As several pupils recommended, "Every P1 class should have Elegant Task. It is very good"; "All P1 classes should use Elegant Task because it is fun"; and "All classes should have Elegant Task. It is very good." Their reactions to the Elegant Task Art lessons were positive and they had nothing to suggest for improving the lessons.

Questions 3 and 4: What the Pupils Learned Through the Elegant Task Art Lessons

Through the Elegant Task Art lessons, the pupils acquired artistic and technical skills. They learned to mix primary colors to get secondary colors, draw the side views of the building blocks to make their house look more three dimensional, create their own repeated patterns and paint them on the rice paper, and print the same fruit or vegetables in many different ways after exploring and experimenting with their group members. In the course of art-making, some of them also made other discoveries to their delight and amazement. They explored and discovered for themselves how to paint repeated objects instead of just creating patterns and that everyday objects found around them could also be used for printing and making beautiful artworks. For example, one of the pupils painted a quarter of a butterfly and when she opened the rice paper, to everyone's pleasant surprise, there was a complete butterfly on the paper. They also learned how to draw a portrait and make a card (e.g., "I learned to make a Mothers' Day card for my mother. I feel proud"), to fold papers creatively, to dye and wait until the rice papers were dry before opening them (so that they would not be torn), to stack up six blocks to make a dream house, and "to look at things carefully before drawing."

In addition to mastering the art-making techniques during the Elegant Task Art lessons, the pupils also acquired soft

skills, including teamwork, interpersonal, and presentation skills. For teamwork they had learned, they shared,

- “I learned to cooperate with my friends during group work. We helped each other and cleaned up together.”
- “I learned to share things with my group members. We must take turn to use the brushes.”
- “I learned to wait for my turn patiently.”
- “I learned to do my part during group work. For example, I laid out the newspapers on the tables. I put the art materials in the middle to share with my friends.”
- “I learned how to work with my friends. I share materials with them and also help them when they are in trouble.”

Examples of interpersonal skills which the pupils said that they had learned included “be nice to my friends,” “help them when they need help” or “are in trouble,” “listen when others are talking,” “help each other and cleaned up together,” and took responsibility for mistakes made, for example, “I accidentally dropped a drop of paint onto my friend’s pencil case. I quickly took out my handkerchief and wiped the paint off. Luckily, my friend was not angry with me.” and “I accidentally topple a container of batik dye. I . . . clean the tables and mop the floor myself.”

In terms of presentation skills, one pupil said,

I can stand in front of my class and talk about my artwork. I know what to say and I say it loudly. Last time, I’m very scared and very shy. After doing in my group a few times, I can now talk in front of my class.

The pupils also developed characteristics that were related to the 21st-century competencies (such as Critical and Inventive Thinking, and Communication, Collaboration, and Information Skills) and student outcomes (such as being a confident person, self-directed learner, and active contributor; taken from website: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/21cc/>). The pupils learned to persevere, to problem-solve “creatively,” “to face fear,” to be “more willing to try new things during art lessons,” to focus when doing art and not to be distracted easily, and to concentrate when doing art instead of talking to friends. One pupil said, “I learned how to solve problems myself. For example, when dyeing the rice paper, I cannot get the right color I want, so I keep trying by mixing two colors until I get it.” Another pupil added, “I learned to face my fear. When I have fear of doing things, I tell myself to be brave and try it. Now, I’m more willing to try new things during lessons.” They took ownership of their learning.

Questions 5 and 6: Ways the Elegant Task Lessons Enabled Pupils to Produce Better Artwork

According to the pupils, their artwork had improved compared to the beginning of the year. One area which

they indicated that had improved was drawing. From their perspective, their drawing now had “improved a lot”; was “nicer,” “more interesting,” and “better”; and “look more real.” Not only were they able to produce quality artwork, they also picked up skills and developed better habits and quality. They could “draw more shapes” and “hold the pencil properly.” They also practiced “drawing more often at home” and during “free time” and had more patience now when drawing, thus showing their ability to self-direct their own learning.

Besides drawing, they improved their painting and coloring as well. Their painting was “nicer” because they could “control the brush well,” “paint within the line,” paint and color “without white spaces,” and “paint in one direction.”

Action Research Cycle 5: My Reflection and Personal Learning

The results of this study showed that the Elegant Task Art lessons were well-received by this group of Primary One pupils. They enjoyed the art lessons because they were more meaningful, interesting, fun, and exciting than past art lessons (from January to April). They also benefited from the exposure to Elegant Tasks both in terms of artistic skills and personal development. They viewed their artworks with pride. They were so motivated and inspired by the Elegant Task approach to learning art that they did extra practice of artwork at home and during free time and they wanted more of such lessons not only for themselves but also for other Primary One pupils. These findings supported Sukaimi’s (2013) point that “when the art-making experience is meaningful and satisfying, students will intuitively feel a sense of ownership and pride.” The use of Elegant Tasks to teach art seemed to have fulfilled the principles of “learner-centered,” “process-oriented,” “contextualized,” “interact-ive,” “initia-tive-related,” and “fun” as articulated in the 2009 Art Syllabus (MOE, 2008).

I had also observed some positive behavior that the pupils exhibited while learning art using Elegant Tasks. First, I noticed that most of the pupils were able to think independently and critically to explore and generate new ideas during the group discussion and collaboration stages. When guided by me, they were able to expand and develop their ideas further (ZPD as mentioned in this Research Cycle 2), and completed their final artwork independently and confidently. Second, the pupils were also able to communicate effectively with me and their peers during the group presentation and class presentation. Third, they were more outspoken and asked questions and sought clarification when they were in doubt and following clarification, they would reflect on their own actions during the art-making process and persevere till they completed the tasks. Fourth, the pupils were able to work effectively in groups. Good teamwork not only promoted a deeper level of learning among the peers but also learning to talk with and to listen to one another were important communication skills that pupils had acquired along the

way. Last, they took responsibility for their own learning as all of them had completed and handed in their final individual artwork for all the art lessons. These observations made (triangulated) support the perceptions of the pupils that they had grown cognitively, affectively, and socially through the Elegant Tasks Art lessons.

The notion of Elegant Task could only provide a framework or a structure for me to work on. Ultimately, I had to decide what could work or not in my class by knowing my pupils well when planning the lessons. Therefore, my selection of topic and the design of the lesson plans in this research study were not a do-this-and-do-that lesson. They were based on three considerations: simplicity, involvement, and achievement. They were intended to amuse the pupils into developing an awareness of his or her own style of thinking, its strong points, and its weaknesses. One pupil might get blocked at a certain point. Another pupil may never make use of certain strategies. Awareness is the first step to correction and improvement in any skill—this is the essence of my lesson plans. In fact, the only effort required from a pupil is that he or she should ask himself or herself the question: “Why am I having difficulty over this?” during the art lessons.

I observed some limitations during this research study. This study was carried out over one term, from July to September. A few lessons were disrupted due to public holidays and closure of school due to National Examination. Thus, I could not carry out the full lesson in each unit as planned. I had to borrow periods from other subject teachers to make up for the lost time. As the period for implementing the Elegant Task Art lessons was short, with only four unit lessons, it was not possible to see its full impact.

In addition, this research project is a very small-scale study. The data collected and analysis could not be generalized due to the small sample size. Time did not permit the use of other methods of data collection so that the additional data source(s) could be used for triangulation. Furthermore, no similar previous research studies were done in this area. Consequently it was also not possible to validate the findings of this study with the findings of other similar research.

Hence, it is recommended that this study be replicated in future with modifications to the design to avoid the pitfalls/gaps of this study. The sample size should be increased and the duration of the study lengthened to better determine the effect of the Elegant Task approach. It is also

recommended that the timing of the project be changed to the beginning of the year so that there would be sufficient time to implement the Elegant Task Art lessons to assess their impact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pupils’ perceptions on the use of Elegant Tasks in art were favorable and promising. The 11 Elegant Task lessons benefited this group of pupils by developing them artistically, socially, and affectively.

In fact, Hase and Kenyon (2007), Hase and Tay (2004), and Tay and Hase (2004, 2010) make a distinction between knowledge and skill acquisition and that of learning. Knowledge and skills or competencies can be acquired and even reproduced. But, this is not learning at a deeper cognitive level. Learning is an integrative experience where a change in behavior, knowledge, or understanding is incorporated into a pupil’s existing repertoire of behavior and schema (values, attitudes, and beliefs). For example, let’s recall a pupil’s comment from “Questions 3 and 4” in the “Data Analysis” section. That particular pupil learned that a third color could be formed by mixing two different colors in class. However, to get the intended color for dyeing the rice paper, that pupil had to go beyond just merely mixing of two colors. First, that pupil had to identify the valid category of color by selecting a pair of different colors. Second, that pupil had to work out the required proportions of each color from the chosen pair of colors from Step 1 to obtain the intended color tone. The two steps mentioned were not taught to that pupil. That pupil had to keep trying in unanticipated situation by mixing the two colors until the intended color was obtained. In other words, it is possible to acquire a set of competencies that one can repeat in familiar or known circumstances. However, if learning has taken place, competencies can also be repeated and even adapted in unfamiliar, unanticipated situations.

After using this pupil-centered approach in my study, I realized that the benefits outweighed those from the traditional teacher-centered approach to teach art. Looking forward, I will be switching to this new approach to teach art without hesitation. I strongly believe that for now this is a positive way forward in teaching art and would strongly recommend it to all art teachers.

Appendix A

Lesson Plan—Color Theory

Name of teacher: Mrs. Poh-Lim Shir Pei, Fiona

School: Ngee Ann Primary School

Class: Primary One Love

Day/Date: Tuesday/14 & 21 May 2013

Duration: 1 hour (per week)

Lesson title	Color Theory —Primary and Secondary Colors (Total Lesson: 2)
Grade level	Primary One
Elegant task	Mothers' Day is coming! You want to design a very special Mothers' Day card for your mother. Draw a portrait of your mother on the card and outline it with black permanent marker. Cover the whole card with yellow, red, and blue colored tissue paper. Use only water and brush to paste the tissue paper on the card. Give the completed card to your mother to surprise her on Mothers' Day
Level of task	Beginning
Constraints (materials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A4-sized card • Black permanent marker • Yellow, red, and blue tissue paper • Brush • Water
Choice	A very personal and special Mothers' Day card
Content/background	Pupils already know the name of the different types of colors. But they do not have prior knowledge of what primary and secondary colors are and how to mix primary colors to get secondary colors
Lesson objectives	
Specific instructional objectives	Teacher will: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show a Youtube video introducing primary colors 2. Encourage pupils to explore and discover how secondary colors appear on their artwork 3. Encourage the use of art vocabulary through discussion about the artwork they made
Specific learning outcomes	Students will: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Seeing) Pupils will see and learn about primary colors through the video 2. (Expressing) Pupils will discover that mixing two primary colors will produce a secondary color 3. (Appreciating) Pupils will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 1 10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuning In: • Pupils to watch a short video clip about primary colors from Youtube • Teacher to elicit responses from the pupils after watching the video • Teacher to draw a triangle on the whiteboard and write yellow, red, and blue at the three corners of the triangle to represent the primary colors 	To get students' attention and to set the context of the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is this video about? • How many colors are there in primary colors? What are they? • Give examples of objects found in the classroom that are primary colors 	Video and objects in the classroom
Week 1 15 min	<p>Introduction Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Elegant Task: • Mothers' Day is coming! You want to design a very special Mothers' Day card for your mother. Draw a portrait of your mother on the card and outline it with black permanent marker. Cover the whole card with yellow, red, and blue colored tissue paper. Use only water and brush to paste the tissue paper on the card. Give the completed card to your mother to surprise her on Mothers' Day. (Point a) <p>Remind pupils that they are only using primary colors to make their Mothers' Day cards</p> <p>Introduce pupils to the art materials: A4-sized drawing paper, brush, container, newspaper, rag, colorful art tissue papers (yellow, red, and blue only), etc.</p> <p>Demonstrate to pupils what to do clearly and send them back to work on their Mothers' Day card individually</p>	Provide sufficient scaffolding for pupils to begin their creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you want to give your mother a Mothers' Day card to make her happy on Mothers' Day? • How will your mother feel when she receive a card made by you? 	Art materials

(continued)

Appendix A (continued)

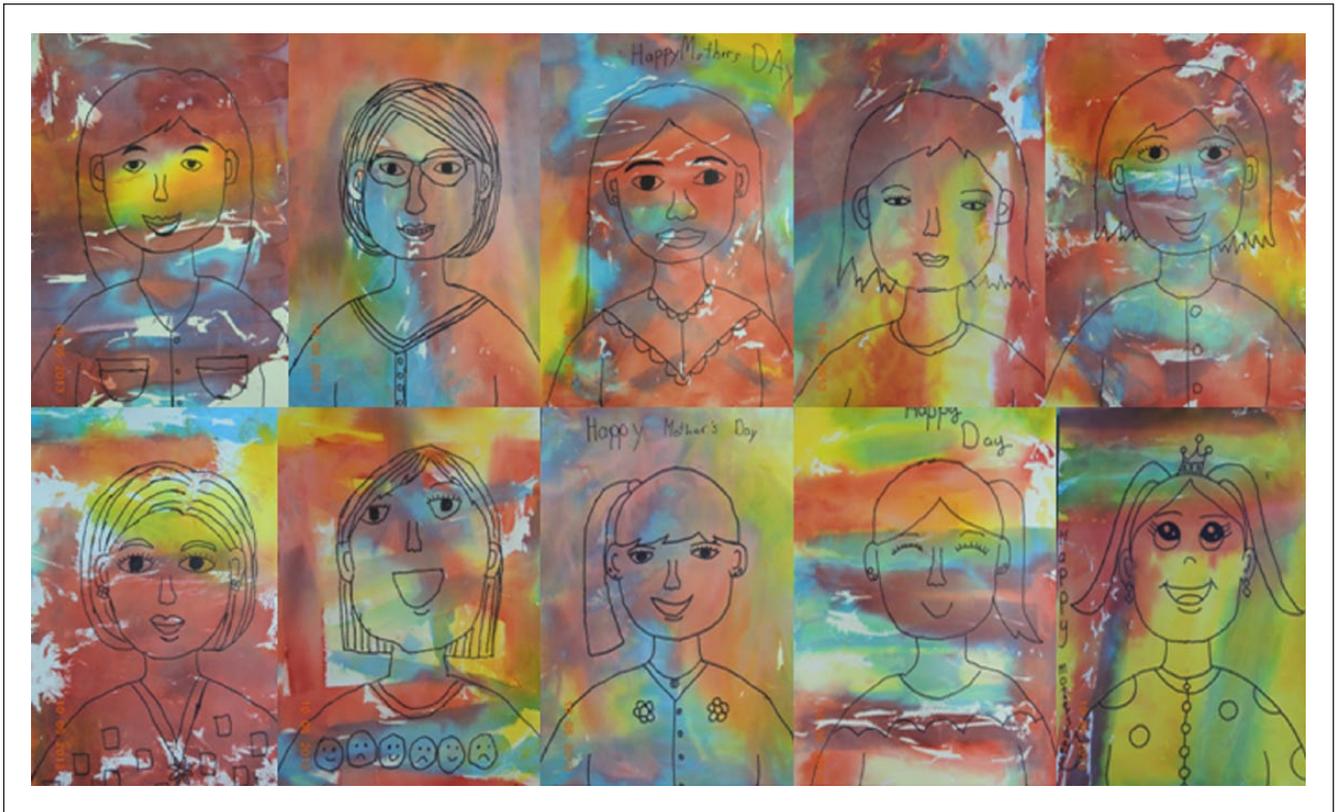
Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 1 30 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work: Each pupil to draw a portrait of his/her mother on the drawing paper and outline it with black permanent marker</p>	Give pupils some room to do self-discovery learning and exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do a simple sketch of your mother's portrait on the drawing paper and outline it with a black permanent marker 	Art materials
Week 2 30 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils to tear the yellow, red, and blue tissue paper into small pieces and stick them onto the drawing paper using water only For every big piece of tissue paper pasted onto the drawing paper, pupils must paste another smaller piece of different colored tissue paper onto the middle of the bigger piece Repeat the whole process until the A4-sized drawing paper is fully covered with the tissue paper The color on the art tissue paper will run when it is wet. Thus staining the drawing paper under it This technique will create an interesting background for their Mothers' Day cards and at the same time, pupils will also discover that when the yellow, red, and blue colors run from the tissue paper, two of them will combine together to create another new color (called the secondary colors). The new colors will be absorbed onto the drawing paper underneath it After drying under the fan, peel and throw away the dried tissue paper Pupils will be thrilled and fascinated to see the colorful printed patterns on their drawing paper plus three new colors Get pupils to think about how the three new colors could have been created even without using orange, green, and purple tissue paper (Point b) In Groups of 4: Pupils to investigate through their observation and rational thinking how and where the new colors (orange, green, and purple) could have come from. Pupils to each share his/her thoughts with group members Pupils to learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their group members (Points c and f) 	Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning and exploration Pupils' ability to describe their observation is important in developing critical thinking skills Group work to foster collaboration between members and to develop interpersonal skills such as speaking and listening as well as team working skills such as leadership, and working with and motivating others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may want to tear the colored tissue paper into small squares, rectangles, or long strips Remember to add another smaller piece of different colored tissue paper onto the bigger piece Apply enough water so that the tissue paper sticks onto the drawing paper Cover the entire drawing paper with the colored tissue paper. You may overlap the tissue paper at the edge so as not to expose any white area Dry your artwork under the fans and return all art materials to me Where did this color come from? Do you know? Can you recall what did you do just now to achieve this color? 	Art materials

(continued)

Appendix A (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 1 25 min	<p>Closure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils to bring their artwork to the front of the classroom and be seated on the floor Teachers to pick three volunteers to present their artworks to the whole class. <p>(Point g)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher to ask guiding questions to elicit responses from the pupils about their discoveries on achieving the three new colors accidentally on their drawing paper Teacher to consolidate what pupils have shared and presented and write on the whiteboard, red + blue = purple, yellow + blue = green, and yellow + red = orange Teacher to introduce the term <i>secondary colors</i> to categorize these three new colors, green, orange, and purple and add in these three colors onto the triangle diagram on the whiteboard to complete the Color Theory. Teacher to briefly talk about the differences between primary and secondary colors To conclude the lesson and to further reinforce the Color Theory concept, teacher to conduct a simple and yet easy experiment with the pupils. Prepare the following items: 3 big Coke bottles filled with water 1 bottle of yellow food coloring 1 bottle of red food coloring 1 bottle of blue food coloring Pick three volunteers. Each volunteer to choose two primary colors and add a few drops of each color into a Coke bottle. As the food coloring flows down and spreads out throughout the whole bottle, pupils can witness the two primary colors blending together to become one new color. It will be an amazing visual feast for the pupils to witness this transformation right before their eyes Students to go back behind their desks to pen down two learning points for the day and one area in which they would like to explore further in their art journals. <p>(Point d)</p>	<p>Expressing opinions to develop critical thinking skills</p> <p>Developing pupils into a confident person willing to take risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you make any accidental colors? What effects do overlapping the tissue paper make? What is the difference between primary and secondary colors? What are some of the challenges faced? What do you like about this activity? Can you think of one area in which you would like to include for future exploration? 	Pupils' artworks
	<p>Suggestion for Follow-Up Activity</p> <p>Pupils can create a pin-wheel using all the six colors from the primary and secondary groups. Pupils to attach the completed pin wheel onto a straw using a round head paper fastener and have fun playing with their pin wheels during recess. When their pin wheels turn, pupils will see that all the six colors combine together to become white color.</p>	<p>Content/background</p> <p>Specific learning outcomes</p>	<p>Pupils already have some knowledge about primary and secondary colors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (Seeing) Pupils will see that art is fun as they make their pin wheel using paper, fastener and straw (Expressing) Pupils will color their pin wheel using Primary and Secondary colors only. (Appreciating) Pupils will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their peers after playing with their pin wheels. 	

Samples of Students' Artworks



Appendix B

Lesson Plan—Drawing from Observation

Name of teacher: Mrs. Poh-Lim Shir Pei, Fiona

School: Ngee Ann Primary School

Class: Primary One Love

Day/Date: Thursday/11, 18, & 25 July 2013

Duration: 1 hour (per week)

Lesson title	Drawing from observation (Total Lesson: 3)
Grade level	Primary One
Elegant task	You have a piece of land. You want to design and build a house for you and your family to live happily in. Create your house using the building blocks and sketch it onto the sketch book using pencil and color it with colored pencils. Consider each family member's likes and dislikes and build a house to surprise them.
Level of task	Beginning
Constraints (materials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of building blocks • Pencil • Sketch book
Choice	A family house
Content/background	Students already had some knowledge on elements of art like lines and shapes. In this activity, they are given 5 or 6 building blocks each. Students will build a structure using the building blocks and then capturing it in a drawing showing the side views (3 dimensional drawing)

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)

Lesson objectives

Specific instructional objectives	Teacher will: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Show how to make structures using different kinds of building blocks Encourage pupils to produce 3 dimensional perspective drawing of their house Encourage the use of art vocabulary through discussion about the artwork they made
Specific learning outcomes	Students will: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (Seeing) Students will see that there are many ways to create structures using building blocks to create their dream house (Expressing) Students will capture the structure onto paper with 3 dimensional perspective drawing (Appreciating) Students will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 1 10 min	<p>Tuning In: Show PowerPoint slides of unique houses around the world and elicit responses from pupils about how they feel about the houses and the people living inside such houses</p>	To get students' attention and to set the context of the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of house is this? Do you like it? Do you like to live in this house? Why? Can you guess what kind of people live inside this house? 	PowerPoint slides
Week 1 20 min	<p>Introduction Activity: Introduce pupils to the Elegant Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have a piece of land. You want to design and build a house for you and your family to live happily in. Create your house using the building blocks and sketch it onto the sketch book using pencil and color it with colored pencils. Consider each family member's likes and dislikes and build a house to surprise them <p>Show pupils the building blocks and demonstrate how to stack them to form a simple structure</p> <p>Get pupils to think about how they want to design their own house that is special to them and everyone living in it will be happy</p>	Provide sufficient scaffolding for pupils to begin their creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you played with building blocks before? How do you stack them to create a building? Think about the kind of house you and your family members would like to live in. Remember to keep in mind their likes and dislikes when you design your dream house 	Building blocks
Week 1 25 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work: Provide each pupil with 5 or 6 building blocks. Pupils will manipulate the building blocks to build a house which is suitable for their family and then capture it in their sketchbook (drawing from observation)</p> <p>Teacher to walk around to provide help when necessary</p> <p>Teacher to ask guiding questions to encourage pupils to draw their structure with side views (3 dimensional)</p>	Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning and exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look closely at your building blocks before you start drawing Draw exactly what you can see Is your house flat with only 1 wall? How do you show that your house is not flat? What can you add to the side to make your house look exactly like the building blocks structure? Think 	Building blocks, sketchbooks, and pencils

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/ remarks
Wk 2 55 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work: Pupils to continue with their sketching and coloring. For those who have finished, they will improve on their sketch or coloring while waiting for the rest to finish Teacher to walk around to provide help when necessary Teacher to ask guiding questions to encourage pupils to draw their structure with side views (3 dimensional)</p>	Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning and exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well done! Your sketch looks exactly like the building blocks but do you notice any difference in the tone of color between these 2 walls? What can you do to show that this wall is brighter than this wall? Can you do the same for the rest of the building? 	Building blocks, sketchbooks and pencils
Week 3 25 min	<p>Group Discussion: In groups of 4, pupils to take turn to comment on their friend's work before presentation by each group member. Pupils may present their work using the following guiding questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is so special about their house? Why did they design their house this way? How did they draw their house on their sketchbook? 	Pupils' ability to describe their observation is important in developing critical thinking skills		Sketchbooks
Week 3 30 min	<p>Closure: Art Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher to display pupils' sketchbooks on the whiteboard while pupils sit on the floor. Teacher to call a few volunteers to come to the front to present their sketches to the whole class Teacher to ask guiding questions to elicit responses from the pupils about their discoveries on achieving the three dimensional drawing of their house Teacher to consolidate what pupils have shared and show the proper way of drawing a 3 dimensional cube, box cylinder, etc. Teacher to show these Youtube videos: Cube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEluiR2sPFk Cylinder: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRd_A4lp9rE Pyramid: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGXKzq-ZRs0 <p>Pupils to write down 2 learning points for the day and one area in which they would like to explore further, select a few pupils to share</p>	<p>Expressing opinions to develop critical thinking skills Develop the pupil into a confident person who is willing to take risks</p>	<p>Do you like this activity? Why? What have you learned from this activity? Do you face any challenges while drawing your house? What are they? How do you solve your problems? Can you think of one area in which you would like to include for future exploration?</p>	Sketchbooks, Youtube videos

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/ remarks
	<p>Suggestion for Follow-Up Activity Week 4: In groups of 4, pupils can create an imaginary playground together using the building blocks and sketch out the structure on a piece of drawing paper separately. Each pupil will have a different view of the structure as they sit around the structure in their groups. After sketching, combine the 4 sketches together to form a 360 degree view of their playground Teacher to display the group sketches in class and conduct a gallery walk.</p>	<p>Content/background Specific learning outcomes</p>	<p>Students already had some knowledge on elements of art like lines and shapes 1. (Seeing) Students will see that there are many ways to create a playground structures using building blocks 2. (Expressing) Students will capture the structure onto paper with 3 dimensional perspective drawing 3. (Appreciating) Students will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups</p>	

Samples of Students' Artworks



Appendix C

Lesson Plan—Fold and Dye

Name of teacher: Mrs. Poh-Lim Shir Pei, Fiona

School: Ngee Ann Primary School

Class: Primary One Love

Day/Date: Thursday/1, 14 & 22 August 2013

Duration: 1 hour (per week)

Lesson title	Fold and Dye (Total Lesson: 3)
Grade level	Primary One
Elegant task	Your school has bought plastic covers for all pupils to protect their desks. Your Principal wants all pupils to decorate their desks (below the plastic cover) beautifully. You are given a piece of white rice paper to decorate your desk. Design your rice paper with repeated patterns using the Fold and Dye method. Fold your rice paper no more than 6 times and dye it with batik dyes to achieve your desired repeated patterns. Decorate your table proudly with your new rice paper once you have finished.
Level of task	Beginning
Constraints (materials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A piece of rice paper (maximum 6 folds) • Batik Dyes • Newspapers • Brushes
Choice	A piece of colorful rice paper with repeated patterns
Content/background	Students already had some knowledge on elements of art such as colors. In this activity, they are given a piece of white rice paper, a few colored batik dyes, newspapers, and a brush. Students will explore and discover that they can create many different types of repeated patterns by folding their paper in different ways
Lesson objectives	
Specific instructional objectives	<p>Teacher will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show how to make a simple repeated pattern using Fold and Dye method (technical part) 2. Encourage pupils to explore different ways of folding their rice paper to achieve their desired patterns 3. Encourage the use of art vocabulary through discussion about the artwork they made.
Specific learning outcomes	<p>Students will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Seeing) Students will see that there are many ways to create different types of repeated patterns 2. (Expressing) Students will fold their rice paper creatively to create desired effects 3. (Appreciating) Students will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/ remarks
Week 1 10 min	Tuning In: Get student to recall what colors are and name the colors of some of the objects in the classroom	To get students' attention and to set the context of the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are colors? • What do you call this group of colors? • What is the color of your desk? 	PowerPoint slides

(continued)

Appendix C (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/ remarks
Week 1 20 min	<p>Introduction Activity: Introduce pupils to the Elegant Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your school has bought plastic covers for all pupils to protect their desks. Your principal wants all pupils to decorate their desks (below the plastic cover) beautifully. You are given a piece of white rice paper to decorate your desk. Design your rice paper with repeated patterns using the Fold and Dye method. Fold your rice paper no more than 6 times and dye it with batik dyes to achieve your desired repeated patterns. Decorate your table proudly with your new rice paper once you have finished <p>Show pupils the technique of Fold and Dye method. Create a simple repeated patterns by folding the paper and dyeing it with batik dyes using a brush</p> <p>Get pupils to think about how they want to design their own personal rice paper so that they will feel happy and proud after completion</p>	Provide sufficient scaffolding for pupils to begin their creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you know what batik dye is? How do you transfer the dyes to the paper? After folding the paper this way, what kind of repeated patterns do you think I can create? Can I fold the paper differently? How? Think about the kind of repeated patterns that you like. How do you fold the paper to get them? 	Rice paper, batik dyes, brushes, newspapers
Week 1 25 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work: Provide each pupil with five small pieces of rice paper (for exploration), and a few colored batik dyes. Pupils will explore and discover for themselves the different ways of folding the paper to achieve different types of repeated patterns. Pupils to record the folding method into their sketchbook Teacher to walk around to provide help when necessary</p>	Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning and exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fold your paper and dye it. Put it under the fan to dry. When it is dried, open it up. What kind of repeated patterns do you get? 	Rice paper, batik dyes, brushes, newspapers
Week 2 35 min 20 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work: Pupils to continue with their previous week's artwork Teacher to walk around to provide help when necessary Teacher to ask guiding questions to encourage pupils to explore more ways of folding the rice paper and the application of dyes on their paper Once pupils have completed, they will paste all their creations into their journal and present their best creation to their group members. Teacher to walk around to facilitate discussion</p>	Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning and exploration Pupils' ability to describe their observation is important in developing critical thinking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try different ways of folding your next paper Record your folding onto your journal as part of your learning process When you are done, paste all your pieces into your journal Chose your best creation and present it to the group members 	Rice paper, batik dyes, brushes, newspapers

(continued)

Appendix C (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/ remarks
Week 3 30 min	<p>Main Activity: Individual Work: Provide each pupil with a big piece of white rice paper, a few colored batik dyes, some newspapers, and a brush. Pupils will fold their paper creatively and dye it to create their desired repeated patterns with their favorite colors</p> <p>Teacher to walk around to provide help when necessary</p> <p>Pupils to dry the completed paper under the fan</p>	Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well done! You have discovered a new way to fold your paper Do you know what kind of repeated patterns you will get? Do you have better ways to dye your paper? Show me 	Rice paper, batik dyes, brushes, newspapers
Week 3 25 min	<p>Closure: Art Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils to hold their paper and stand in a big circle. Give pupils some time to admire and appreciate their peers' artwork Teacher to call a few volunteers to stand in the center to present their paper to the whole class Teacher to ask guiding questions to elicit responses from the pupils about their discoveries on achieving the accidental effects Teacher to consolidate and recap what pupils have shared. After that, show PowerPoint slides on repeated patterns and talked about repeated patterns in depth and how to create the different types of repeated patterns Pupils to write down two learning points for the day and one area in which they would like to explore further, select a few pupils to share Give pupils 5 min to decorate their desks with their newly designed rice paper 	<p>Expressing opinions to develop critical thinking skills</p> <p>Develop pupil into a confident person who is willing to take risks</p> <p>Pupils' ability to describe their observation is important in developing critical thinking skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a few moments to admire and appreciate your friends' artwork What have you learned from this activity? Did you face any challenges while you are folding or dying your paper? What are they? How did you solve your problems? Did you discover anything new? What are they? What is a pattern? How do you repeat the pattern? What other ways can you do to create repeated patterns? Can you think of one area in which you would like to include for future exploration? 	Rice paper, PowerPoint slides
<p>Suggestion for Follow-Up Activity Pupils can bring an old T-shirt from home and dye the T-shirt using the Fold and Dye method. As the medium has changed from paper to cloth, pupils will explore new ways of folding a T-shirt and dying it. At the end of the lesson, pupils to put on their T-shirt and have a fashion parade in class. They are allowed to pose/walk creatively to best showcase their new creation</p>		<p>Content/background</p> <p>Specific learning outcomes</p>	<p>Students already had some knowledge on elements of art like colors and repeated patterns.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (Seeing) Students will see that there are many ways to create repeated patterns on their old T-shirts. (Expressing) Students will create a new fashion by transforming their old T-shirts into fashionable apparel (Appreciating) Students will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups 	

Samples of Students' Artworks



Appendix D

Lesson Plan—Printmaking

Name of teacher: Mrs. Poh-Lim Shir Pei, Fiona

School: Ngee Ann Primary School

Class: Primary One Love

Day/Date: Thursday/29 August, 2 & 5 September 2013

Duration: 1 hour (per week)

Lesson title	Printmaking (Total Lesson: 3)
Grade level	Primary One
Elegant task	You have spent almost a year now in Ngee Ann Primary School since you left kindergarten. Imagine that next year, you will buddy a new batch of Primary One pupils! What would you say to your new buddy about the best moment/event you had in Ngee Ann Primary School since January this year? Capture this memorable moment/event using the Printmaking technique. Ink your object with water-proof paint using a brush and print it by hand-pressure. You may also use other objects found around you. Be creative and have fun!
Level of task	Beginning
Constraints (materials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of materials • Brush and paint • Construction paper • Newspaper

(continued)

Appendix D (continued)

Choice	A print about "My Best Moment in Ngee Ann Primary School"			
Content/background	Pupils already had some knowledge on elements of art like lines, shapes, and colors. In this activity, they are given some materials to explore and discover how they can use these materials creatively to create an interesting print			
Lesson objectives				
Specific instructional objectives	Teacher will:			
	1. Show pictures of artworks done by other children			
	2. Encourage pupils to think of other ways to create interesting prints using the given materials			
	3. Encourage the use of art vocabulary through discussion about the print they made			
Specific learning outcomes	Pupils will:			
	1. (Seeing) Pupils will see that there are many ways to create lines, shapes, and patterns with various effects using materials with different textures			
	2. (Expressing) Pupils will manipulate and explore given materials creatively to create desired prints			
	3. (Appreciating) Pupils will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups			
<hr/>				
Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 1 10 min	Tuning In: Get pupils to recall what the elements of art like lines, shapes, and colors are and how they can create them	To get pupils' attention and to set the context of the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the different kinds of lines you see in this classroom? • What is the shape of the whiteboard? How do you know? • What is the color of the xxx? If you do not have orange, what can you do? 	Whiteboard and objects in the classroom
Week 1 20 min	Introduction Activity: Introduce pupils to the printmaking technique optional Youtube video: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_ZUVcuS-Xo) Teacher to demonstrate the inking and printing process using one of the materials Get pupils to think how different the prints could have been if the same material is used differently	Arouse pupils' interest and motivate them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ink the object carefully using the brush • Press hard for a few seconds and don't move the object • What kind of print will I get if I turn the object around and print it? Think 	PowerPoint slides and Youtube videos Printing materials
Week 1 25 min	Main Activity: In Groups of 5 or 6: Provide each group with many sheets of paper, brushes, and paint Give each group a fruit or a vegetable (pupil's choice) and some other materials. The members of the group are to investigate, manipulate, and explore at least 4 different ways of printing the fruit/vegetable and 1 or 2 ways of printing the other materials. Print the newly discovered ways on a clean piece of paper Groups that have completed their task can continue to explore other ways of printing the materials while waiting for the others to finish up	Give pupils room to do group-discovery learning and exploration Group work foster collaboration between pupils and develop interpersonal skills such as speaking and listening as well as team working skills such as leadership, and working with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the fruit or vegetable carefully. How can you use them to create interesting print • Did you expect to achieve this effect when you print it? How do you feel when you see the print? • Think of other ways of printing this fruit or vegetable 	Paper, brushes, paint, different types of fruit and vegetables, corrugated board, nets, fabrics, newspapers, and so on

(continued)

Appendix D (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 2 55 min	<p>Group presentation:</p> <p>Each group will be given about 10 min to present their findings and group prints</p> <p>Each group must present at least 4 different ways of printing the fruit or vegetable and 1 or 2 ways of printing the other materials. They will also share how they achieve their end results + any new discoveries + 1 accidental EFFECT (if any) that they have discovered along the way</p>	<p>Pupils' ability to describe their observation and expressing opinions is important in developing critical thinking skills</p> <p>Develop the pupil into a confident person who is willing to take risks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you make any "mistakes"? • What effects do the "mistakes" make? • Tell me more about the different types of textures on your prints • What are some of the challenges you faced? • What do you like about this activity? 	Group prints
Week 3 15 min	<p>Introduction Activity:</p> <p>Recap what they had done the previous week</p> <p>Show PowerPoint slides of prints done by other children using fruit/vegetables + other materials</p> <p>Get pupils to think about how the prints could have been created</p> <p>Introduce the Elegant Task:</p> <p>You have spent almost a year now in Ngee Ann Primary School since you left kindergarten. Imagine that next year, you will buddy a new batch of Primary One pupils! What would you say to your new buddy about the best moment/event you had in Ngee Ann Primary School since January this year? Capture this memorable moment/event using the Printmaking technique. Ink your object with water-proof paint using a brush and print it by hand-pressure. You may also use other objects found around you. Be creative and have fun!</p> <p>Get pupils to think and decide how they want to create their own print using the given materials</p>	<p>Allow pupils to appreciate artworks done by other children who used different parts of the fruit/vegetables and other materials to create interesting prints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of this print? • How do you think it is made? • Describe the lines/patterns/textures/colors you can see on this print • What do you think the artist is trying to express? • Do you like the work? Why? 	PowerPoint slides
Week 3 30 min	<p>Individual work:</p> <p>Pupils are given some time to try out their friends' recommendations to encourage collaborative learning. After the group presentation in Week 1, pupils would have experience at least 3-4 ways of using the given materials</p> <p>Pupils will then proceed to produce their own print. They may use the materials provided or create/look for their own materials (either within or outside the classroom) to create their desired print</p>	<p>Give pupils room to do self-discovery learning and exploration</p>		

(continued)

Appendix D (continued)

Time (min)	Activities	Rationale	Questions/instructions	Resources/materials/remarks
Week 3 15 min	<p>Closure: Art Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher to display pupils' prints on the whiteboard while pupils sit on the floor Teacher to highlight a few prints for class discussion. Pupils to buzz about the selected prints and talk about the lines, patterns, textures, colors, and feeling of these prints Teacher to call a few volunteers to come to the front to present their prints to the whole class Teacher to ask guiding questions to elicit responses from the pupils about their discoveries on achieving the print. Teacher to consolidate what pupils have shared and highlight the element of art—texture. Show PowerPoint slides of different types of texture and the unique print these textures can create Pupils can brainstorm about what other materials with special textures they can use to create more interesting/unusual prints. Pupils to write down two learning points for the day and one area in which they would like to explore further, select a few pupils to share 	Consolidate learning and reflect on their actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you like this activity? Why? What have you learned from this activity? Do you face any challenges? What are they? How do you solve your problems? Can you think of other materials you would like to include for future exploration? 	Pupils' artworks
<p>Suggestion for Follow-Up Activity Pupils can create teachers' cards using the printmaking technique. They may explore the abstract theme such as "Explosion of Colors." They can look for objects with unique textures for their prints (e.g., leaves, plastic bag, twigs, personal objects, etc.) Elements like colors and textures are emphasized in this activity. Pupils can learn to gather these objects in groups and share their discoveries among members. Pupils will give their cards to their teachers on Teachers' Day</p>		<p>Content/background</p> <p>Specific learning outcomes</p>	<p>Pupils already had some knowledge on elements of art like lines, shapes, textures, and colors</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (Seeing) Pupils will see that there are many ways to create interesting lines, shapes, and textures using various materials (Expressing) Pupils will manipulate different materials to create desired effects (Appreciating) Pupils will learn collaboratively and evaluate what they have discovered among their assigned groups 	

Samples of Students' Artworks



Appendix E

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you like the Elegant Tasks approach to learning art and doing artwork?
 - (if yes), why?
 - (if no), why?
2. Give an example of an Elegant Task Art lesson which you liked.
 - Which part(s) of the lessons do you like?
 - Why do you like those parts/that part?

Give an example of an Elegant Task Art lesson which you disliked.

- Which part(s) of the lessons do you dislike?
 - Why do you dislike those parts/that part?
3. What did you learn about art-making during Elegant Task Art lessons?

- Tell me more about the skills or techniques that you have learned in each unit.
4. Apart from the art-making skills and techniques (mentioned in Question 3), what else did you learn during the Elegant Task Art lessons?
 - Think about what you have learned during the different stages of a unit topic.
 - Are there any memorable incident(s) that you can tell me? What did you do? How do you feel?
 5. Did the Elegant Task approach help you to produce better artworks compared with those done before the Elegant Task Art lessons?
 - If yes, in what ways?
 - If no, why?
 6. What kind of feedback or suggestions can you give to improve the Elegant Task Art lessons?
 - (if yes), why? Can you tell me more?
 - (if no), why?

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to:

- My school leaders, Mr. Koe Ee Tiong (Principal), Mr. Edwin Hoy (Vice-Principal), my Reporting Officer, Miss Sharon Kuah (HOD Aesthetics) for giving me their support and the opportunity to embark on this Action Research (AR) project with the pupils in Ngee Ann Primary School.
- My colleagues in Ngee Ann Primary School for their help in video-taping all the AR lessons and their kind assistance in one way or another to complete my AR journey.
- Ms. Tang Hui Jing and Ms. Ira (STAR Officers), and Ms. Poh Chwee Sian (STAR AR Consultant), for their tireless guidance and financial support throughout this Action Research journey.
- Dr. Tay Boon Hou for his invaluable support, guidance, and constructive comments in my Action Research journey.
- Mdm Sangeetha and Research@EastZone in organizing consultation sessions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Dick, B. (2001). Action research: Action and research. In S. Sankaran, B. Dick, R. Passfield, & P. Swepson (Eds.), *Effective change management using action learning and action research* (pp. 21-28). Lismore, Australia: Southern Cross University Press.
- Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2007). Heutagogy: A child of complexity theory. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 4, 111-118.
- Hase, S., & Tay, B. H. (2004, November 8-10). Capability for complex systems: Beyond competence. In *Proceedings of Systems Engineering/Test and Evaluation Conference, SETE 2004, Focusing on Project Success*, Adelaide, Australia. (CD-ROM).
- Kay, S. I. (1998). Shaping elegant problems for visual thinking. In B. J. Potthoff (Ed.), *Creating meaning through art: Teacher as choice maker* (pp. 259-288). NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, New Jersey..
- Lowenfeld, V. (1947). *Creative and mental growth*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Ministry of Education. (2008). *Art syllabus: Primary and lower secondary*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/aesthetics-health-and-moral-education/files/art-primary-and-lower-secondary-2009.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2010, March 9). *MOE to enhance learning of 21st century competencies and strengthen art, music and physical education*. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2010/03/moe-to-enhance-learning-of-21-s.php>
- Sukaimi, I. W. (2013). Engaging students through elegant problems. In K. B. Lim, G. Kwa, & V. Loy (Eds.), *Drawing learners: Perspectives on art education* (pp. 9-15). Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts, Singapore..
- Tay, B. H., & Hase, S. (2004). Role of Action Research in workplace PhD research. *Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, 9(1), 81-92.
- Tay, B. H., & Hase, S. (2010). Lemma for action research. *Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, 16(2), 3-22.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In *Mind and society* (pp. 79-91). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Author Biography

Fiona Shir Pei Poh-Lim is a passionate and experienced Art Educator teaching in a neighbourhood Primary School in Singapore for the last 17 years. This is the first time she is embarking on an Action Research project to study ways to enhance her pupils' learning and engagement in Art lessons. She hopes to have more opportunities in the future to conduct more Action Research projects to improve her own teaching Methodology and Pedagogy.