Poetry, masks, and movement: Exploration in maskmaking and creative movement

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Poetry, Masks, and Movement: Exploration in Maskmaking and Creative Movement

by
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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts, Integrated Arts Education
The University of Montana
2000

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Date
8-11-2000
ABSTRACT

Poetry, Masks, and Movement is a project that involves maskmaking and creative movement. It is through this project that I hope to gain a deeper understanding of myself as a teacher and an artist. I also want to give my students the opportunity to find the artist within themselves. The goal is twofold: to make personal as well as classroom masks using different mediums, and to create movement pieces to accompany the masks. The personal masks will be made by me and represent my perspective of self, relationships, and environment. The classroom masks are made by a classroom of six to eight year olds and represent the students' experiences with self and others. The students and I will create movement pieces, independent of each other, that demonstrate the meaning of the masks.

The final part of the project is a performance incorporating the masks and creative movement. I want to create an individual piece and choreograph a separate piece with my students as the performers. The goal of the performance is to allow me to speak to the audience through my movement with the masks. The goal for the student performance is to show the audience of family members and friends the masks and movement pieces we created in the classroom.

The project was successful as I explored new areas in mask making and creative movement, both with myself and with my students. I experienced various dance and movement classes. My creative energy was channeled into the work with my own masks, the mask making experiences with my students, the creative movement activities, and choreographing the students' performance.
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I. Intent of Final Creative Project: Masks, Movement, and Poetry

Art is a continual process of exploration and interaction. Through the process of exploring and interacting with oneself, the environment, and relationships, the artist finds meaning and understanding that is reflected in the artwork. This exploration of self involves an acknowledgement of the creative spirit that resides in us all.

The examination of self and the evolution of my own creativity has fascinated me since I began the Creative Pulse program. My experience with my own creativity, as well as observing the experiences of others, has led me to realize that when a person believes in herself and her creativity, there is a natural outpouring of the beauty called art. Developing your own creativity requires both a sense of faith in yourself and an absence of any judgment that may be stifling. According to the book, *The Creative Spirit*, believing in your own creativity is “to be able to rely on it without a second thought. To have faith is to know that you have a power within you that is always available to you. That is what your creativity can become for you, and faith in it strengthens its presence in your everyday life.” Having faith in what you are creating leads to an openness of expression. Although there is a place for judgment in art, value judgments can stifle the artwork and the artist. Second guessing your creativity can lead to further suppression. Rather, venturing deeper into the realm of one’s own creativity, whether it is with familiar or unknown mediums, requires a strong sense of determination, desire, a belief in one’s creativity, and an absence of judgment. In my own experience with mask making and the creative process, I acquired confidence in my artistic abilities as I evolved creatively along with the projects. This confidence waxed and waned with each project and within each project.

Creating a piece of artwork, whether it is a mask, a painting, a sculpture, or a dance piece can give a person first hand experience in what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

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refers to as an “optimal experience”. As we feel a sense of exhilaration and enjoyment with what we are doing, we “feel in control of our actions, masters of our own fate.”

He states further that, “the best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen.”

As I created my masks, at times I found myself in a state of flow where judgment and thought were suspended, time did not matter. My hands were feeling the experience, I was lost in the feel of the clay. It was as though I opened myself up and allowed for this state of flow to occur.

Providing children with a variety of experiences so they can further develop their creative selves became more important to me as I began to recognize my own creativity. I wanted to provide experiences for my students that would allow them to explore different avenues of creative development for themselves. My experiences during the three summers with the Creative Pulse program affirmed what I had known all along: children learn differently, in different ways, and through different activities. In his book *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner identifies and defines seven intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence. Historically, success in school was related to one’s competency in the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. Activities that developed the other intelligences are less often entertained in the traditional school setting. It was important to me to incorporate art and movement into my classroom lessons to enhance the spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences of my students and myself. The mask making project, the creative movement activities, and the poetry performance exposed my students to opportunities that developed these other intelligences. By working together in group situations, students had to communicate with each other and create something. It was through these activities that students were given

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3 Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi (1990) 3.
an opportunity to develop their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Providing students with opportunities to learn more about themselves and how they relate to others is important in the early grades. When students are in school for a full day surrounded by others in a classroom community, it is important that they learn to relate to others in a working situation. This lays the foundation for future school experiences.

The Final Creative Project for the Creative Pulse was designed to be a continuation of my explorations in mask making and dance. Mask making was a new art form for me that I wanted to explore through teaching myself as well as my students. I intended to explore different ways of making masks as well as develop movement pieces to accompany the masks. First I would create some of my own masks and then I would introduce my students to mask making experiences. I planned to work with clay and plaster and allow my experiences to determine the materials that the students would use. I anticipated that my students would use simpler mediums and make simpler masks as they are six to eight years old. Additionally, as I had limited experience teaching art, I wanted to ensure the students’ success. With the creative movement aspect of the project, I intended to delve deeper into creative movement and dance. This would happen with myself individually and in the classroom with my students. Creative movement was new territory in that I was creating new lessons and choreographing a piece. Being uncertain about the end product would allow me to focus on the process of the experiences. The final production would involve movement and masks together in a performance. This performance would be a compilation of the work we had done throughout the school year. I was not clear what the performance would look like and felt it would evolve out of the work we did together as teacher and students.

It was through this project that I hoped to further explore possibilities of creativity within myself and my students. Students naturally like to move and explore movement in their bodies. Throughout my three years in the Creative Pulse program, I found the same to be true about myself. I enjoyed finding natural movements in my body. The masks would serve as vehicles for expression. It
was through the process of experiential learning as well as problem solving that I gained a deeper understanding of myself as artist and teacher. Using the creative process, I allowed the projects to evolve. I relied on my inner self for direction. I limited guidelines and instructions so that the creative process could unfold. Upon opening the senses to such an experience, things began to fall into place, ideas evolved, forms took on new shapes, and discoveries were made. It was important to open up and allow myself to respond to the intuition and allow that intuition to be channeled into the project. It is a state where time does not matter, judgments are suspended, creative juices are flowing freely, and life feels wonderful. According to Csikszentmihalyi, this is the process of "flow".

II. Making Meaning: The Maskmaking Process

In the fall of 1999, I began exploring the art of mask making. I read mask making books from the Missoula Public Library and the University of Montana Library and discovered the different possibilities which included a wide range of potential materials. Some of the more common materials used are plaster, clay, papier mache, wire, or leather. Techniques vary. Some entail more craftsmanship than others. I learned about the leather mask that requires wetting the fur, stretching it over the form, sewing it, and then cutting out the details. Another popular mask making method is a poured plaster cast. I considered this type but knew I needed to keep it simple and ensure success. Alginate is another material. It is a very flexible material (dentists use it to make molds of your teeth) that can be used to make a life mask by pouring it onto the person's face. It needs a plaster mother mold poured on top of it to reinforce it and shape it. I was intrigued with the alginate method but decided it too would be difficult to use for my first mask.

I chose to use plaster gauze strips for my first mask. As I read about the procedure, the process was simple and I was sure to be successful at it. One of the requirements I had for myself for my first mask was that the process was not complicated. I wanted to be able to work my way through the making of a mask
independently and without too much difficulty.

Realizing it would be difficult to apply gauze strips to my own face, a friend applied the strips to my face and then I applied the strips to another person's face, creating two masks. I planned to leave one mask in its raw form and decorate the other mask. Although I had a plan in mind for that mask, I hesitated to make the first mark. In its plain plaster state, the mask did not invite judgment. Putting a mark on it changed its condition from nearly raw material to a work of art. In the weeks before I could apply the first stroke of paint I realized that the mask would reflect a portion of my understanding of myself, my relationships, and my environment. People would be interpreting my perspectives and I would be revealing parts of myself to others through painting the mask.

The mask making process and other aspects of my life combined to make finding a balance in my life very important to me. Changes and new experiences required much of my energy. I had a new, meaningful relationship, a classroom full of children to consider as I developed new lessons in art and movement, and a growing need to nurture already established relationships. In the midst of my busy, changing life, a regular routine of exercise and yoga provided the key to balance. The balance poses in the yoga class inspired me to consider my life and how I could create harmony for myself. A correlation existed between how well I did the balance poses and how well I was handling the varied aspects of my life. Sometimes I could hold the poses without faltering while at other times I swayed from side to side unable to overcome my difficulties in maintaining balance. These simple exercises mimicked my life and highlighted the importance of balance and harmony on a broad life scale.

My "Balance" mask (see Appendix 1) evolved from these experiences. Visualizing the yin-yang symbol, I painted the mask black and white. My interpretation of the yin-yang symbol revolves around balance and my awareness of the many uses of the word "balance" in our culture such as balancing male and female spirit or energy, balancing work and family, balance of power, and even balancing a checkbook.
A person who follows the traditional Chinese system of medicine believes there must be harmony between the yin-yang forces in one’s life to ensure good health. In the book, *Staying Healthy with the Seasons*, Elson M. Haas states, “the life force, or chi, is present in the two primary forces, yang and yin. These are dualities or polarities reflecting opposite states in continual interchange. Yang is pure energy corresponding to heaven; yin is substance and represents earth. Yang, the male, active, light principle, is that force which wishes to expand into everything; yin, the female, receptive, dark principle is the force that wants to contract into nothingness. The interaction of these two forces is what determines the very nature of the universe.” I felt as though I was constantly seeking to balance such forces in my own life. For me, it was about balancing the male and female spirit in me, balancing the demands of my job, balancing the demands of my relationships, and balancing the art and movement lessons in my classroom. I faced these challenges daily.

To complete the mask I applied a coat of glossy acrylic. The shine of the mask takes on a brilliance, reminding me that I shine when there is balance in my life. Attaching black and white rafia to the top of the mask symbolizes the chaos I sometimes feel prior to striking a balance. My “Balance” mask speaks to me of the harmony I feel when I consider all the channels of demands, breathe deeply into the possibilities, do what I can, and allow myself to flow naturally to the state of equilibrium by embracing one thing at a time.

Making the mask “Senescence” (see Appendix 2) followed a different course in that I found myself searching for meaning in the raw face I had created. This was a clay mask made by pressing the clay into the plaster gauze mold. It did not resemble my face as I had originally thought it would. Rather, it possessed the likenesses of an older woman. As I looked at this mask, I saw a seasoned face, thus warranting the title “Senescence” which means “the state of being old, the process of becoming old.”

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I used a different method in making this mask and expected that the intricate
details and texture of my face would be accentuated in this mask. Forming the clay
into flat, little square pieces, I pressed them into the mold, which was coated with
petroleum jelly. The entire inner surface became covered with the clay pieces and I
smoothed the seam lines. I then built up a thicker edge of clay around the outside
dge of the mask to make it easier to pull out. As this was my first time making this
kind of mask, I was afraid it might harden too much and be difficult to extract from the
mold. Thus, I pulled the clay out before it had a chance to harden completely. At
this point it was necessary for me to work with the clay and shape it accordingly. I
used water to smooth it. Not knowing how it would turn out I kept working the clay. I
found myself getting lost in the process and the feel of it. I could work with clay for
hours. Time was suspended, nothing mattered but making the mask. I experienced
the focused concentration and involvement defined as “flow” by Mihalyi
Csikszentmihalyi, “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing
else seems to matter.” This was apparent by how inspired I was and how quickly
time passed. When I finished the mask to my liking, I let it sit idle for a few weeks,
unsure of what I wanted to do with it and how it would evolve.

Looking at this mask, I began thinking about the process of aging and how
people and things show their age. I began looking at the faces of people around
me. I studied their lines and wondered about my own face, how it was aging, and
how it would continue to age. I began to internalize the feeling of my own aging and
the fact that I cannot go back to my youthfulness. Pondering this further, I searched
for beauty. There must be beauty in the wisdom of experience. How wise is the
flower that has been subject to so many settings? How wise is the tree that stands
alone in the forest for years? How wise is the old woman who listens to her heart
and soul? There is beauty in wisdom and aging! Looking around, I discovered the
elegance of the aging rose. How beautiful and intricate are its petals as it dries out.

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5 Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi (1990) 4.
To me, roses are more beautiful in their dried state. I cannot throw them out. Incorporating dried roses into this mask, I attached them to the top rim of the mask. They added beauty to the old looking face. The painting of green stems down the face of the mask represents the lifeline of the rose. At the bottom of the lifeline, dried leaves were added. This shows that even though the roses are passed their prime, they are still connected to life. Lastly, a glossy finish was applied to represent the glow of aging. In its finished state, this mask speaks to me of wisdom, beauty, and appreciation. It celebrates the spirit of aging beautifully.

It was while working with the dried roses and allowing for the creation of the mask that I again found myself in the state of "flow". Maybe this mask should be entitled "The Flow of Senescence" as I "flowed" through the making of this mask more than once and I may "flow" through the experience of aging. I affirmed what Carl Rogers found to be true in his article entitled "Toward a Theory of Creativity, which is that "it has been found that when the individual is open to all of his experience, then his behavior will be creative, and his creativity may be trusted to be essentially constructive." Through the stage of choosing just the right flower to go where I trusted it to go, I was enmeshed in my own creativity.

III. Making Meaning: Creative Movement and Dance

Each summer I leave the Creative Pulse feeling inspired and confident in my ability to dance and move creatively. I am excited about continuing the dance and cannot wait to find just the right dance class to join. I feel confident I will find it. In the fall of 1999 I began scanning the paper to find the classes that are being taught. The first dance class I enrolled myself in was a Cuban Salsa dance class. Although I was not sure what this class would be like, it was the only suitable dance class offered at the time and I was optimistic about new possibilities for movement. After the first session, I realized that the class did not require much movement of the body.

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Rather it entailed moving the feet in a certain pattern to the beat of the music. Not only was I disappointed with the lack of body movement, but also I found it difficult to remember the specific movements for the feet. The concentration required tended to stifle any creative movement I could incorporate into the dance. I continued to attend the classes but knew it was not leading me in the direction I wanted to go.

In December of 1999, I was asked to be part of a First Night, New Year’s Eve performance (see Appendix 4). This performance involved dancing with a mask, made by a local artist, to an African tale about the spirit of community. The music was African drumming. The five dancers wore masks that covered the entire head and rested on the shoulders. The masks symbolized the different elements of our community and our earth: air, water, land, community, and spirit. I selected air and was adorned in white with a big mask. The performance involved audience participation whereby small groups were given ten minutes to develop a dance portraying the specific element. After the ten minutes, all of the groups formed a large circle and began the dance together. At a cue, the group that represented a particular element danced into the middle of the circle and performed their piece, with the masked dancer leading. The groups followed each other.

I was excited to have an opportunity to dance and perform but I was also nervous because this was a performance. The fact that it included audience participation allayed some of my fears as I would not be on stage alone. During the two rehearsals I found myself holding back, self conscious of my dancing. It was the familiar feeling I often experience when I am unsure of what I am doing. Self doubt creeps into my consciousness. I was concerned about how it would work with the group, not knowing what would come out of the group dynamics and the short period of time we had to create a dance piece. I felt it necessary to spend time, days before the performance, in a relaxed state, visualizing the performance in a positive, creative light. Drawing on those thoughts helped me maintain positive energy and a creative spirit.
The night of the performance, I found myself relaxed once I had on the white outfit and the mask. I moved freely and creatively and enjoyed the performance. In my journal entry from that experience, I wrote, "I found myself nervously awaiting the performance. Questions raced through my mind, questions about myself, questions about my expectations, questions about my performance. Do these questions distance me from the flow of the experience? Do these questions distance me from myself and my creativity? The answer is yes. As I allowed myself to forget the questions and allowed myself to move with the drums, I moved freely as a performer, it felt exhilarating! I felt I could do it creatively. My inhibitions disappeared. As I worked with my group, the energy flowed."

With hopes of maintaining that energy, I attended two other dance classes that were offered in the spring. One had a Feldenkrais focus while the other one was entitled "Moving Energy." I found the latter class to be exactly the kind of dance I had been waiting to do. Unfortunately the instructor cancelled a class and then I became enmeshed with another project that took my time in the evening.

Throughout the year I attended every dance performance presented by the University, beginning with the Fall Dance Showcase, then the Montana Transport Company Performance, and finally the Spring Dance Showcase. I learned to recognize the dancers and had my favorites. I saw a few pieces twice and was particularly inspired by the Fall Dance Showcase. I imagined choreographing a piece myself. Meanwhile, I danced with friends, I danced with my partner to local music, and I moved creatively with my students in the classroom.

The combination of experimenting with dance classes, performing on New Year's Eve, attending university performances, and working with my students did not produce a visible final performance for me in dance. However, the value of those experiences and the accompanying frustrations and inspirations, reinforced an important lesson and inspired a special commitment to the creative process. I observed repeatedly that relinquishing some control did not detract from creative movement but allowed for greater creativity, not only for myself but for my students. My interest in Cuban Salsa did not revolve around learning precision movement but
in the potential for incorporating more body movement into that Latin dance. Despite my initial concerns, the spontaneity of the African dance performance exhilarated me. More than once, I found the kind of dance class that emphasized the creative spirit. And finally, with my students I observed how too much instruction tended to limit imagination and thus, stifle creativity of movement. With these experiences in mind, I focused my energy and commitment on making masks and working with my students in mask making and creative movement.

IV. Mask making and Creative Movement

A. Papier Mache Masks and Feelings

Making the masks with my students was an evolutionary process in that I was teaching an art form that was somewhat new to me and I was allowing it to unfold. With the students I chose simple mediums for simpler masks than the clay and plaster masks I had made. Paper bags and papier mache seemed like the safest and simplest route to take with my students on this new, uncharted course of mask making. Carol Sivin in her book, *Maskmaking*, states that, "a mask is an ideal structure for exploring three-dimensional art with children. Most children are fascinated by the idea of masks and disguise, and are easily motivated to create their own mask, which can reveal much about their personalities." For their first mask, I wanted my students to make a mask that would tell something about themselves and lead to expression in their bodies. The focus of this project became "feelings". Often one's body displays a feeling without any verbalization. As we talked about our feelings, I wanted them to begin paying attention to how feelings are expressed through movement.

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We began this journey with the book, *Today I Feel Silly* by Jamie Lee Curtis. During the first reading, I paused periodically and discussed the particular feeling, encouraging my students to relate a similar feeling or experience. Upon finishing the book, we took a few minutes, checked in with ourselves, and described how we were feeling. Asking students how they were feeling at a particular time became a spontaneous practice I incorporated into our days. I observed how they became more discerning with their feelings. They moved from the common "happy and sad" feelings to the more complex feelings of "excited", "nervous", and "confused". Usually the students could explain why they were feeling a certain way.

Encouraging my students to express themselves, allowed them to strengthen their understanding of themselves. Intrapersonal intelligence deals with the ability to understand one’s self, including one’s thoughts and feelings and make distinctions between pain and pleasure. This deeper understanding empowered my students to be more expressive in everyday situations.

Experiencing the *Today I Feel Silly* book a second time, the students moved creatively as I read. There was a level of comfort and joy in their movements and I surmised that this class loved moving. It deepened their understanding of the book and confirmed the idea that movement aids learning. Carla Hannaford states in her book, *Smart Moves*, "Thinking and learning are not all in our head. On the contrary, the body plays an integral part in all our intellectual processes from our earliest moments right through to old age. It is our body's senses that feed the brain environmental information with which to form an understanding of the world and from which to draw when creating new possibilities. And it is our movements that express knowledge and facilitate greater cognitive function as they increase in complexity." I was providing my students with opportunities to gain more understanding about themselves, their thoughts, and feelings.

As we read other books and poems about feelings, we put the movement

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of feelings into our bodies and faces. We studied just the facial expressions of different feelings, then just the body movement. We experienced the feelings in different rhythms. They wrote and painted about different feelings (see Appendix 5). Then I read *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Suess to the students. This book brings color to feelings. A discussion about how one color can represent many different feelings followed. Even though this was abstract thinking, the students were able to make the association between colors and feelings. They associated yellow with busy, green with tired, blue with sad, and red with happy or energetic. The colors and feelings varied among the children. I accepted whatever association they made as it made sense to them and I wanted to ensure a safe and supportive environment.

After choosing a feeling and then drawing a facial expression of it on paper, students set out to make their masks (See Appendix 6). Using their sketch, they began to make their masks. They stuffed a paper bag with newspaper to represent their head. I encouraged them to match the shape of the head as best they could by looking in the mirror and holding it up alongside. They tied the bag at the bottom. I demonstrated how to add the strips of newspaper with papier mache on it. The materials for this project were set up in the back of the room and students worked on it independently in pairs. I soon discovered that unsupervised students and papier mache are extremely messy. After a few pairs were done, I found puddles of goop all over the area, on the table, on the floor. It was too late but next time I would have a parent helper assisting me. Since it was my first time doing such a project, I was uncertain and I did not want to involve parent helpers. I like parents to help in my classroom, but not when I am unsure about what I am doing. In my solo journey with papier mache and masks, I chose to stumble along on my own.

When the two sets of the papier mache strips were applied and dried, we began to add the facial features to the masks. I had not worked through this ahead of time so I found myself problem solving with my students as we went along. How do we put the nose on and then papier mache it? Or do we just paint on the nose? It was easy to work through this together as a class. I am the kind of teacher who
likes to admit I do not know how to do certain things. It allows me to be more personable with the kids and it empowers them. Papier mache mask making was a perfect opportunity for me to trust this process and their expertise in problem solving.

Asking the students to visualize how they wanted the nose on their mask required a certain level of imagination as they had to picture in their mind what it would look like. Spatial intelligence is the ability to think in pictures and visualize details. We were relying on our spatial intelligence as I asked them to visualize the details of a face, particularly the nose of their mask. I was also asking them to think through the process of creating such a nose. Knowing some of them had more ability with this then others, I could trust that their expertise would guide the rest of us. I also trusted the creative process with this project. They were helping me, we were moving through it together. Some students decided to construct a nose out of tag board and papier mache while other students elected to paint on the nose. After the construction, we were ready to paint. Students had to choose a color for their masks that represented the feeling. Blue, red, pink, and brown were the most popular. The students demonstrated that feelings can be any color. Happy was the most common feeling but it was represented by various colors. One group of girls chose feelings such as lonely, shy, silly, and sad. They chose individual colors to represent those feelings. When I asked the students about their color choices, all of them were able to explain their reasoning.

After painting the entire head, we let the masks dry overnight. Coming in the next day, I discovered that some of the paint had cracked. Was it because we used tempera paint or was it because they applied too much paint? How do I remedy it? A question that an art teacher could answer easily left me befuddled. We decided to paint the cracked masks again and hope they would turn out better. The students painted detail on the faces using opened mouths, yawning for tired, smiles showing joy for happy, and frowns showing sadness. We discovered that the eyes are another feature that express a lot of emotion. Students painted wide opened eyes to show happy and closed eyes to show tired. Lastly, the students added feathers
to their masks as the finishing touch. Some added just a few, while others added many. When the masks were complete, I watched as they interacted with each student wearing his or her mask. There was a buzz of excitement humming throughout the room.

Students gathered in groups according to the feeling of their mask. Together they created a poem that followed the same rhythm of the book, *Today I Feel Silly.* Once they had the poem completed, they worked on creative movement to accompany the poem. It was necessary to exaggerate the movements because their faces were covered with the masks and would not show the emotion. Seeing the various styles of their movement and poems reinforced the idea that students create according to their ability level and the ability of the group working together.

Although I experienced frustration at times with this project because of my lack of experience, there were moments when I knew it was all worth it. At various times when they were painting their masks, I would walk around the room, observe, and listen to their conversations. It was a delight to see them so intent on painting and adding details and I was filled with satisfaction. They were so engrossed in this process. It reinforced for me the importance of art and creativity in the classroom.

**B. Paper Plate Masks and Group Stories**

Our creative movement activities expanded in a new direction when we studied the parts of speech, emphasizing verbs and adverbs. We explored verbs in our whole body, in particular body parts, and then as we moved through space. Adverbs naturally follow verbs so we enhanced our movement with the addition of adverbs. Now the students were moving "slowly" or "stiffly" or "wildly." This brought a whole new exaggeration to the movement. One activity entailed students individually choosing a verb and an adverb from bags, putting them together, and creatively moving to the words. The rest of the class guessed the verb and adverb. Some were easier to guess than others because of the
specificity of the movement. This was a good teaching point in that students were beginning to see the importance of intentionality.

The next phase of this project was to write group stories. Students worked in groups of four. I assigned the groups and ensured each group had a strong leader. I also took group dynamics into consideration. In their groups, they had to choose a list of at least ten verbs and possible adverbs. From that list, they wrote a group story using as many verbs as they could. There were two requirements for the stories: there had to be four characters and the students had to use at least ten verbs and adverbs. The characters could be animals or people. The students knew they would be adding movement to the stories upon completion. Some groups were done quickly and some took more time. Some groups needed more guidance from me than others.

After the stories were written, I helped with editing. Each group then created movement for their story. It was necessary to emphasize the difference between creative movement for the story and acting out the story. We discussed these differences and then experienced the differences with our bodies. Creative movement was much more challenging than simply acting out the stories. When each group had their stories and movement ready, they showed it to me. At this point, I helped with choreographing their piece. Now they were ready to make the masks for the characters (See Appendix 7). This time we used paper plates for our masks. Students were expected to tell me what additional materials they would need to complete their masks as I tried to supply them with all the materials they needed. Individual students took several trips to the library to get a book that showed their animal character so they could make the mask. I supplied them with the materials and let the groups figure it out on their own. I would guide a group if they were experiencing difficulty and needed some guidance. At one point a group was struggling with how to make a horse mask with just a paper plate. A hard task even for me. I did not have the answer. I considered asking the art teacher for guidance, knowing she would be able to tell me without hesitation. However, I knew it was necessary for me to be committed to this process so I allowed myself to help
the group through trial and error.

Finally the group stories were ready to be performed. The stories were prerecorded by me. Students moved creatively as the tape played. I have to commend my students on this project. As I reflect on the process of this project, I am amazed at what I asked of the students and how they succeeded with it. Their movements were beautiful and the masks creative.

C. Poetry and Creative Movement

In April of 2000, my students and I had an opportunity to see a "Poetry Alive" performance sponsored by the school. Two adults performed poetry. As they recited the various poems, they moved their bodies and their voices. I watched as my students enthusiastically observed them performing the book, Today I Feel Silly (with which we were so familiar.) A few students turned to me to acknowledge that we knew that story. After school, several teachers had an opportunity to meet with the two performers and gather ideas about how poem performance could be incorporated into the classroom. For me, this was another opportunity for my students to move creatively by reading, hearing, and speaking poetry. Students learned effective stage communication when they learned the four key points to poem performance. The key points are establishing confidence stance, facing your audience, filling your space, and projecting your voice. As the students worked in groups with the poems, they practiced the key points. This became a common language that we understood. Students began using the terms as they offered feedback to others.

For a poem performance, students were expected to memorize the poem and design movements to accompany each stanza of the poem. Students began working in groups of three or four, reciting the poem in unison or by individually, and doing movement to their part. The movement could be done by the individual or by the entire group. Some groups incorporated sound effects to enhance the meaning of the poem. I could see a new appreciation for poetry and movement develop as
they fine-tuned their performance. It was a natural process to include this activity in our end of the year performance. This activity allowed the groups to be creative and expressive and it was obvious that they had fun doing this.

V. Evaluation of the Poetry, Masks, and Movement Performance

The student performance was scheduled for June 6, 2000 in the evening. I had sent out a notice to parents asking them if an evening performance would work for them. Many of the parents were receptive as it would allow spouses and siblings to attend. So often, only one parent is able to attend when an event takes place during the day. I also thought the evening performance would allow other teachers and professors to attend. This performance was a compilation of all we had done throughout the year with masks, movement, and poetry. It included the feelings masks and poems, the poetry performance, the group stories, and two songs with movement. I wrote a script that tied all the pieces together so the program flowed and the audience could understand the evolution of the project.

Students were assigned speaking parts and we began to practice. We practiced daily for two weeks as I found a part of each day that allowed for this. Since the group stories were done earlier in the year, it was just a matter of revisiting them and intentionalizing our movements. As we worked with the feelings masks and movement, we discovered that students had to project their voices because they were speaking from behind a mask. I did not anticipate this. Reminding ourselves of the four key points for poem performance throughout our rehearsals helped the students present themselves in a loud and clear way.

We had practiced individual parts of the program before bringing it all together. It was my hope that the students would carry the entire performance without much direction from me. I was unsure of how the masked part of the performance would be received. I felt I was taking a risk as I had never done this kind of a program. We learned two songs for the end of the program and created movement to accompany them. The idea was that we would all do the same
movement at the same time. I was fortunate to have many good singers in my classroom this year and they did a beautiful job with the songs. I knew the songs would be successful no matter what else happened. That thought comforted me through my times of uncertainty.

I sat in the first row with the audience and gave the cue to begin. From that point on, I was not needed other than to play the tape recorder when necessary. The students carried the whole program. Nobody missed a cue. One of the most amazing things is that every single student projected their voice. The audience could hear every student, even with their masks on! It was a big success and the feedback I received was reaffirming. Parents commented on how creative the masks were and how creative the children were in the performance. I was so proud of my students and their ability to create and perform their work in a fun setting.

VI. My Development as a Teacher/Artist in the Creative Pulse

The final project of this master’s program is a true reflection of my evolution as an artist and a teacher. When I first started the Creative Pulse program, back in the summer of 1997, I was learning about my own creativity and the various ways I could express it. Taking a closer look at myself personally, professionally, and artistically that first year enabled me to be introspective and supportive of myself. Intuitively, I knew this program would stretch me in new and different ways. As I look back on my first year journal entries, there were expressions of exhilaration and inspiration as well as confusion and uncertainty. Although the road would be windy and bumpy, I knew I could travel it.

The Creative Pulse provided a safe and supportive environment where there was acceptance and non-judgment. Being continually encouraged, supported, and even admired gave me permission to extend beyond my level of comfort. I will never forget my first drama performance where I had to present myself in a loud and big way. Me, loud and big? I had never done that before. I
knew how to be quiet, pleasant, and safe. Now I was being asked to take loud risks while I was unsure of the outcome and unsure of people’s reactions. Although it was scary, it was through this experience and many others that I have learned the importance of honoring oneself. What a person has to say, not what people think about it, is the essence of life.

Believing in oneself and the process in which you are involved is characteristic of a leader. Through this program my leadership skills have blossomed. Stepping beyond my comfort zone, believing in myself, and taking risks with my teaching as well as my art are abilities I now possess. This creative project stretched me in ways I cannot clearly articulate. I found myself continually taking risks with my students as well. I gained a new level of confidence with each new venture. When my questioning voice spoke up I would step back, think of the meaningful interpretations of the project or experience, and embrace it with passion. This passion drove the project.

I have always believed in the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to learning as well as hands-on activities. I have not always seen the importance of “creating art” on a regular basis. From my trial and error experiences with various art forms, both within my classroom and outside on my own, I have gained more confidence in my ability to do art and teach art. Therefore I will continue to infuse more art instruction into the different curriculum areas. By bringing new experiences to my classroom, my students will have an opportunity to discover the artist within themselves.

I have come to see the importance of accepting their art as an expression of themselves. Through my experiences in the Creative Pulse, I learned that no matter what I did, I was accepted and encouraged. Providing experiences where the creative process can unfold requires setting up classroom experiences that encourage students to express themselves freely. Through all the performances, self assignments, and individual projects required for the Creative Pulse program, I have had the freedom to explore my own creativity and evolve as an artist and teacher. I have learned to provide this kind of environment more often in my
classroom. Observing my students this past year while making masks and working together in groups to create movement with the masks was the creative process at work. I applaud myself for allowing this to happen and providing the safe environment where their artwork would not be judged but rather accepted and applauded, where they were given the time and the materials to create, and where they were given guidelines but also freedom. This allows the different levels of creativity to emerge. I have learned to accept the different levels of artists in my classroom and view their artwork as a creative representation of who they are. It has also allowed my students to believe in themselves and grow in their artistic abilities.

Performing my stories in various settings and with various groups has led me to see the importance of sharing myself and my abilities with others. From these experiences I find myself sharing my stories with my students more often. Personalizing the teaching and learning process allows my students an opportunity to see me as a human being. Each year I find myself opening up more and more. Along with that, I encourage students to share their own stories throughout the year. We do not spend as much time writing creative stories with imaginary characters. Instead, my writing program centers around the students writing about what they already know and their own experiences. We are continually learning about each other throughout the year as we share our stories.
List of Appendices

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APPENDIX 1 - Picture of the "Balance" mask
APPENDIX 2 - Picture of the "Senescence" mask
APPENDIX 3 - Close up picture of the “Balance” mask and the “Senescence” mask
I feel green because I see green leaves in the spring and beat which fits the spring leaf.
I feel red because I have a lot of energy because I feel like I could run a block.
APPENDIX 6 - Pictures of the Maskmaking - "Feelings" masks
APPENDIX 7 - Pictures of the completed "Group Stories" masks
Dear Class,

Hi. I decided it would be a good idea if I stayed home today. I rested my voice.

I hope you have a product. You should have a good lesson. After recess, I have time for you to do a job (see below). When I get home, we will spend the evening playing the stories. So you are a great student.

Sincerely,

Mom.
Poetry, Masks, and Movement
A Performance by Miss Kane's Class

WELCOME Makahl Smith and Evan Schultz

Student Conversation
Stephanie Ehrlich and Austin Sereday

FEELINGS MASKS AND POEM
HAPPY: Max, Rebecca, Alex, Jordyn, Kristina
TIRED: Evan, Forrest, Rachael
HAPPY: Tessa, Stephanie, Tyler, Makahl,
LONELY, SAD, SHY, SILLY: Cassidy, Kelsey, Holly, Rhu

Student Conversation
Holly Keane and Rachael O'Leary

POEM PERFORMANCE
THE BAD MOOD BUG#1: Makahl, Evan, Rhu, Megan
THE BAD MOOD BUG#2: Tessa, Tyler, Jordyn, Forrest
THE TURTLE: Rachael, Holly, Rebecca, Austin
SUNSHINE#1: Kristina, Cassidy, Alex, Kelsey
SUNSHINE#2: Holly, Stephanie, Forrest, Max
GROWTH OF A TREE: Holly and Kelsey

Student Conversation
Cassidy Brooks, Kelsey Glynn, and Rhuzana Maddeaux
GROUP STORIES (MASKS AND MOVEMENT)

Four Cats: Evan, Kristina, Tessa, Tyler
Four Kids: Forrest, Kelsey, Stephanie, Makahl
Turtle and 3 Dolphins: Alex, Holly, Makahl, Rebecca
Two Dogs, A Man, His Sister: Austin, Cassidy, Max, Megan
3 Horses and a Donkey: Evan, Jordyn, Rachael, Rhu

Student Conversation
Jordyn Hunting and Tessa Berg

MUSIC POEM All Students

GARDEN SONG AND RAINBOW PLANET SONG
All Students

THANK YOU Megan Thorstenson
Good evening and welcome to our end of the year program.

This is a program of movement, masks, and song. We want to share with you what we have been doing throughout the year. Sit back and enjoy!

Student #1: Everybody has feelings, both good and bad, happy, sad.
Student #2: It is good to talk about your feelings and express them.
Student #1: Remember what we did this year with feelings?
Student #2: Yeah, let's see....
   First we picked a feeling. (3 students come out one by one with a feeling written on a card and the class expresses it.)
Student #2: Then we made a mask. (Hold up a mask)
Student #1: Then together in a group we wrote a poem about that feeling.
Student #2: Hey, let's show what we did with feelings and masks.

FEELING MASKS AND MOVEMENT
   MAX'S GROUP
   EVAN'S GROUP
   TESSA'S GROUP
   HOLLY'S GROUP

Student #3: All year we learned different poems.
Student #4: It has been fun this spring when we brought the "Poetry Alive" through poem performance.
Student #3: Do you remember the four key points in poem performance?
Student #4: Let me think.....
   CONFIDENCE STANCE (Students show confidence stance.)
   FACE YOUR AUDIENCE (Students show face your audience)
   FILL YOUR SPACE, (Students show fill your space)
   PROJECT YOUR VOICE! (Students show project your voice)

Student #3: Let's perform some poems!!

THE BAD MOOD BUG#1
THE BAD MOOD BUG#2
THE TURTLE
SUNSHINE #1
Student #5: Another project I liked was when we wrote and performed our group stories. Do you remember that?

Student #6: Yeah, we chose different verbs and adverbs. (Students hold up verb and adverb word cards as they walk by.)

Student #7: Then we wrote a group story and made masks out of paper plates to go along with the characters.

Student #5: Then we created the movement for our stories.

Student #6: It was challenging to do just movement with our stories.

Student #7: Let's show what we did with our group stories.

EVAN, KRISTINA, TESSA, TYLER
FORREST, KELSEY, STEPHANIE, (PERFORMING FOR BONHAN)
ALEX, HOLLY, MAKAHL, REBECCA
AUSTIN, CASSIDY, MAX, MEGAN
JORDYN, RACHAEL, RHU, (HOLLY PERFORMING FOR CAZDEN)

Student #8: Now we would like to share one more poem with you.
Student #9: And two of our favorite songs!!

MUSIC POEM
GARDEN SONG
RAINBOW PLANET

Student #10: Thank you for coming. Please join us for punch and cookies.
APPENDIX 9 - Video of the Poetry, Masks, and Movement Performance
(Housed in the School of Fine Arts)
Bibliography:


