Observational learning in cultural and arts education: supporting students' processes in two artistic domains: poetry and visual arts

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SESSION

Q 5 | 29 August 2009 | 13:30 - 15:00
room: Agora: Piet Mondriaan Room
Symposium
category: Specific Academic Domains
The art of teaching arts: enhancing the artistic creative process

participants

- Chairperson: Talita Groenendijk, university of Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Organiser: Talita Groenendijk, university of Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Discussant: Tanja Janssen, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

The aim of this symposium is to discuss process-oriented approaches to enhance students' creative processes. We will discuss both social interaction and its effects on the artistic creative process, and more cognitive approaches to enhance students' creativity. Various domains of art making are involved: dance, creative writing, design, and visual art, at various levels of schooling (primary, secondary and higher education). The symposium provides insight in how classes can be organized to enhance artistic creative processes and in the effectiveness of process-oriented approaches.Jenny Hallam conducted an ethnographic study on the interaction between children in primary school art lessons. Äli Leijen and Talita Groenendijk both used video to enhance learning. Äli Leijen studied the effect of self evaluation and peer feedback in dance education, using video recordings (qualitative approach) in higher education. Talita Groenendijk carried out an experimental study in secondary education, examining the effects of observing others at work (from video) on both process and product in two modi of art: creative writing and visual art. Raza Shah and Bill Nicholl carried out an experimental study, focusing on fixation in the creative process in design education at secondary level. They argue that teachers should be aware of cognitive processes when teaching creativity. The discussion will focus on the plusses and minuses of the methodological and pedagogical approaches.

Observational learning in Cultural and Arts Education; supporting students' processes in two artistic domains: poetry and visual arts

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This study aims to contribute to the development of Cultural and Arts Education in The Netherlands by testing a specific learning arrangement based on observational learning (Rijlaarsdam, Braaksma, Couzijn, Janssen, Raedts, Steendam, & Toorenaar, 2008). This learning arrangement was designed to support students in art making by

reflecting on their own and others' art making and to extend students' strategic repertoire. In the experimental learning arrangement, students observe, compare and evaluate peer models (on video) who perform creative writing tasks and visual-creative tasks. A quasi-experiment was conducted with 120 participants (15/16-year old students, 10th grade) and three conditions: observation with focus on good model, observation with focus on the weak model and learning by doing (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam & Van den Bergh, 2002). The effects of observational learning are studied on students' creative processes and products. It was examined which learning arrangement is more beneficial to students' creativity; observing peer models (focus on good or weak model) or guided practice. We replicated Braaksma's approach (Braaksma et al., 2002), reporting aptitude treatment interaction effects for strong and weak students in creativity.

Summary

Previous studies have shown that observational learning is an effective learning tool for students when learning to write informative or persuasive texts (Couzijn, 1995; Braaksma, 2002; Raedts, 2007). Students who observed (weak and strong) peer models performing a writing task, wrote better texts than students who learned by performing the writing task themselves. The observation of peer models affected students' writing processes; students who had learned to write by observing more often engaged in metacognitive activities during writing, than students who had learned by practicing writing. Braaksma (2002) showed that weak writers who were confronted with a new task, learned more from focusing on weak models, while better writers learned more from focusing on competent models. Although observation proved to be effective in the writing of informative, persuasive, and synthesis texts, less is known about the effectiveness of observation in creative tasks. During the '70s, a few studies have been conducted on the role of modeling and creativity. Zimmerman and Dialessi (1973), for instance, found that observing models had beneficial effects on children's creative idea generation. Few instances of mimicry of the model were found; apparently, children responded to the more general characteristics of the model's performance. In the current experiment, we aimed to study the effects of observational learning on artistic creative tasks in two domains; creative writing and visual art. Our hypotheses are that observational learning has a positive effect on both creative writing and visual art making, on both the process and the final product. We also assume that model similarity in competence has an impact on the effect of observational learning. We developed a learning arrangement in which students observed peers at work (through video), performing poetry writing and collage making tasks. The models in the videos thought aloud, while carrying out the task, which enabled students to understand and evaluate their creative process. Processes shown in the videos were based on findings from previous research (Groenendijk, Janssen, Rijlaarsdam, & Van den Bergh, 2008; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). We identified four important process characteristics; problem definition, exploration, flexibility and critical evaluation. Instances of these process characteristics were shown by the models in the videos. Students either observed other students at work (observational learning) or carried out the tasks themselves. We developed two observation conditions; focus on the good model and focus on the weak model. A pre- posttest control group design for both the poetry and the collage experiment was used. 120 students participated; they were about 15/16-year old, in 10th grade of higher general and pre-university education. They were

recruited from three different schools from different parts of The Netherlands.All students wrote two shorts poems and made a collage at pre- and posttest to measure the effects of observational learning. We measured differences between the conditions; differences in product quality and differences in the process. The quality of students' writing products and collages was determined with the aid of Amabile's consensual assessment technique (Amabile, 1982). The processes were captured by using keystroke logging (creative writing) and making 'snapshots' (photographs of the collages in progress) of the process every five minutes. Various process variables were studied; length of the process, amount of revision, timing etc. Besides, ten students carried out the tasks while thinking aloud, which gave us more detailed insight into their processes. In our contribution to the symposium we will present the results of the experiment, indicating the effect of observational learning on students' creative processes and on the quality of the creative products in two domains: poetry writing and collage making. Process data were analysed by multilevel analyses, with processes nested in students. Beside condition effects, we report interactions between learner characteristics, and condition effects, showing that for learners with low initial scores on creativity other pedagogical choices must be made than for students with high initial levels of creativity. Data for creativity as product were analysed with variance analyses and regression analysis (Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, & Van den Bergh, 2008), including pretest scores for creative tasks as learner characteristics. These analyses show differential effects of learning conditions for learners with low and high creativity levels. Our study contributes to the acquisition of knowledge on creativity and modeling. It provides insight in the possibilities for enhancing creativity in the classroom through observation, providing new possibilities to connect production, reception and reflection in art education. Finally it gives insight into the domain specificity of observational learning to enhance creativity by studying both poetry writing and collage making.

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