

## **“I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free”: Developing Aesthetic Literacy in Visual Culture Studies**

Dornehl Ellen Kitching  
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge  
dornehl@gmail.com

Received: December 2016  
Accepted: March 2017  
Published: September 2017

### **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to provide theoretical insight into the teaching of visual culture studies in South Africa, with a specific focus on a visual analysis lesson. It was based on a thesis written in fulfillment of the University of Cambridge’s MPhil Education course requirements. It proposes an approach to visual art teaching in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grades 10 - 12), that seeks to develop students’ aesthetic literacy. This stems from the fact that only a limited number of higher education institutions in South Africa provide training for future FET visual art educators (e.g. University of Johannesburg; University of Fort Hare; University of Witwatersrand; and Walter Sisulu University). Per the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), educators should be providing students with skills that can be developed through aesthetic education approaches. This study offers a visual analysis planning framework and lesson plan for FET art educators that will guide them in shaping students’ aesthetic literacy through the development of content knowledge, and the engagement of the imagination and feelings. The research design used in this study was a *meta-ethnography*, which Noblit & Hare (1988) define as the synthesis of interpretive research through the comparison and analysis of texts, while creating new interpretations in the process.

*Keywords:* aesthetic literacy, imagination, empathic skills, visual culture studies, meta-ethnography

### **1. A Challenging Start**

#### **1.1 Retrospection**

*“I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free”*

Michelangelo (1475 – 1564)

After acquiring a bachelor degree in Education (B.Ed) at a South African university, I was equipped with a pedagogical toolkit to teach visual art. What I was presented with after graduation, however, was a ‘block of stone’ that I was unfamiliar with and I soon realized that

my pedagogical ‘sculpting tools’ were not suited for this new ‘medium’. To use Michelangelo’s quote, I failed to release the metaphorical angel from the marble, i.e. my pragmatic training and teaching techniques did not truly engage the imaginations and emotions of the adolescent students to awaken their consciousness and develop their empathic skills.

Per the aims reflected in the visual art Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, students should be able to demonstrate skills such as “insight” and “understanding” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 8, 45) and can have “meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country” (p. 4). These aims require much more of educators and “if we are going to positively influence children and youth as maturing, whole people, we will be called on to give attention to their social, emotional, ethical, and physical growth” (Dewey, 2005, p. 4). This, together with the current social and political turmoil in South Africa, calls for an educational approach that would allow educators to cultivate these different facets and shape students into socially responsible citizens. The question I ask myself, and one the South African Education Department should consider, is: What sort of education would best enable students to function in the present society and contribute to the creation of a just and democratic social order? And how can we equip future art educators to create this kind of education through their practice?

## **1.2 Considering an Alternative Approach**

Students need to be taught to notice social, political, and economic contradictions, and to act against oppressive elements of reality. Freire refers to this awareness as the ‘*conscientização*’ (Freire, 1993, p. 17). It is this type of critical consciousness – the noticing of political and social injustice and subsequent reaction to it – which I struggled to develop within my students during my initial teaching years. My inexperience, together with a limited pedagogical toolkit, did not allow me to fully engage my students’ imaginations and emotions. To cultivate a consciousness such as Freire describes, educators should carve away at the mundane and awaken students’ awareness through multiple perspectives to perceive reality, not the mere conveying of lifeless knowledge detached from reality. Dewey’s answer to this dilemma is “a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of the imagination, and artworks are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living” (Dewey, Morris & Shapiro, 1993, p. 90).

The essential need for arts education to aid in preparing diverse students to become socially responsible and empathic citizens is such a crucial component of education. Unfortunately, many South African institutions fail to effectively prepare educators with the practical skills to facilitate social development in the FET art classroom. The “imagination [is] the only gateway through which meaning can find their way into a present interaction” (Dewey, Boydston & Edel, 2008, p. 276). Art educators can create the space needed for these new possibilities and awareness, by creating moments of clarity and joy that will eventually give meaning to students’ lives (Greene, 1977, p. 20) through the development of their *aesthetic literacy*. CAPS provides South African art educators with an image of an education based on social transformation, critical learning, and social justice. Yet, not enough attention is placed on the actual teaching tools and techniques that are necessary to truly discover, sculpt and release this potential of every FET student in the art classroom. This research will, therefore, look to answer the following research question:

*How can art educators develop FET students’ aesthetic literacy in visual culture studies?*

Greene (1999) defines aesthetic literacy as an agent that frees human beings to “feel, to know, and to imagine” that will enable them to “understand their own lives in relation to all that surrounds” (p. 7). The main objectives of this study, therefore, was to design a visual analysis teaching framework and a lesson plan for art educators that will guide them in developing FET art students’ aesthetic literacy through the development and engagement of a) knowledge in visual culture studies, b) the adolescent imagination, and c) feelings of empathy. The next section will allow a brief overview of the literature on aesthetic literacy, including reference to knowledge, imagination and empathy.

## **2. Exploring the Possibilities**

### **2.1 Aesthetic Literacy in Art Education**

*“Painting and sculpture are very archaic forms. It's the only thing left in our industrial society where an individual alone can make something with not just his own hands, but brains, imagination, heart maybe.”*

Philip Guston (1913 – 1980)

The arts are invaluable in promoting social justice, developing social skills, and for its ability to “confront how we have learned to see and provide new lenses for looking at the world and ourselves in relation to it” (Bell & Desai, 2011, p. 288). According to Simpson, Jackson &

Aycock (2004), it is the responsibility of educators to help students “develop a view of life that helps them get beyond personal interests and consider the interests of others, including their schools, communities, nation, and world” (p. 21). While the imparting of art knowledge is important, understanding what is seen and comprehending visual relationships are as important (Department of Basic Education, 2011). But *how* do we teach students to understand and comprehend visual relationships, and ultimately, facilitate an aesthetic experience?

Reimer (1967) suggests three basic activities that can directly affect the quality of students’ aesthetic perception: talking about art, creating art, and analysing art. It is the third activity, namely analysis, that he feels is the most efficient and powerful means to improving aesthetic awareness (p. 11). Visual culture studies is an effective tool to promote the development of aesthetic literacy, specifically in South Africa, because it requires less financial and material resources, which makes it attainable for a wider population of lower income schools. Greene (1995) reasons that these encounters with art should involve conscious participation in a work – perceptually, affectively, and cognitively – and, therefore, cannot simply constitute knowing ‘about’ the artwork in a formal academic manner.

### **2.1.1 Knowledge**

From my own experience as a high school art teacher, I have found that the lack of quality in students’ interpretations of artworks is often a result of a limited knowledge base when encountering artworks that depict foreign cultures, events, values, and views than their own. It is for this reason that art educators should be able to engage adolescent students and present new knowledge in a way that appeals to them, to interpret artworks. In this study, I will be using Feldman’s (Feldman, 1973; Feldman & Woods, 1981) systematic approach of interpreting art, when referring to a visual analysis. This approach consists of four stages: description, formal analysis, interpretation, and evaluation (Feldman & Woods, 1981).

### **2.1.2 Imagination**

Dewey (2005) describes the imagination as the point “...when old and familiar things are made new in experience...” (p. 278). Likewise, Kaag (2014) states that the imagination allows us to “escape the mediocrity of our daily lives, to transcend the self-imposed boundaries—conceptual, personal, and social—that limit our growth. It is the imagination that generates a work of art, and it is the imagination that grants us the ability to interpret artworks...In short, it is

the imagination that makes us fully human” (p. 3). It is, therefore, essential that educators are given the necessary tools to engage the imaginations of art students for them to successfully create and interpret artworks, as well as allowing these students to develop as social human beings. Greene (1995) relates to Kaag’s (2014) notion of the imagination, which allows us to look beyond the mediocrity of our lives and transcend self-imposed boundaries. She refers to this kind of imagination as one’s *social* imagination, which allows us to “invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficit society on the streets where we live, in our schools” (Greene, 1995, p. 5). This deficit in our society can be seen in the “fearful expansion of the AIDS epidemic, the numbers of abused babies, abandoned babies, and homeless people; the racism; the school drop-outs; and the violence” (p. 66). These are some of the social issues that South Africa are dealing with, yet, like Greene remarks, education today is rather focused on technical achievement than creating a community of citizens. For students to be conscious, they need their imaginations to break through the “inertia of habit” (p. 272), before they can go on to create new interpretive orders and to change and transform our worlds (p. 61). That is why the engagement of the social imagination should receive greater prominence in our schools, to answer to the deficits in society. It allows educators who are passionate about promoting social justice practices, to peel away illusions, to awaken students’ senses and their ability to imagine alternatives that can sustain the collective work necessary to challenge entrenched patterns and institutions and build a different world (Bell & Desai, 2011, p. 287).

### **2.1.3 Feeling**

According to Hunter (2013), empathy helps a person know emotionally what others are experiencing from their frame of reference and can assist us in seeing other realities, and alternative meanings of situations. Similarly, Hoffman (2000) regards empathy as “the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible” (p. 3) Its functions also include “social understanding, emotional competence, prosocial and moral behaviour, compassion and caring, and regulation of aggression and other antisocial behaviours” (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2011, p. 86). It allows for “greater understanding and sharing of the feelings of the ‘other’” and this has the potential to “result in less prejudice, less conflict, and more positive social overtures” (ibid, p. 87). It should be noted here that the focus of this research is the

development of FET students' empathic skills. Its application, however, does not include students with neurological impairments, nor was it concerned with the influence of empathy bias.

### 3. Updating the Sculpting Toolbox

*"Because of its shape, colour, pattern and hardness, the stone has its own story to tell. Only when I understand this can I remove the non-essentials and begin to liberate the form within."*

Tony Angell (1940 - )

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research design used for this study as a *meta-ethnography*, which Noblit & Hare (1988) define as the "synthesis of interpretive research" (p. 10) through the comparison and analysis of texts, while creating new interpretations in the process (p. 9). My aim was to gather and interpret data that was produced in the literature on aesthetic literacy, visual analysis, engagement of the imagination, adolescence, and the development of empathic skills.

#### 3.2 Methodology

Noblit & Hare (1988) proposed seven steps in conducting a meta-ethnography: a) getting started; b) deciding what is relevant; c) reading the studies; d) determining how the studies are related; e) translating the studies into one another; f) synthesising translations, and g) expressing the synthesis. I started by identifying an "intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform" (p. 26) by designing an appropriate research question and objectives for this study. I had to approach the answering of this question through an initial research and reading of separate bodies of literature relating to my research interest. The next stage required putting various studies 'together', which involved determining the relationships between the studies to be synthesized (p. 28). After reading all the literature, the conceptual similarities between the different texts were considered in terms of answering the research question. The data was categorised using "instructional strategies" in relation to visual analysis knowledge, the adolescent imagination, and empathic skills to judge its relevance. Figure 1 illustrates a summary of the meta-ethnography process that I incorporated while also keeping in line with the seven steps offered by Noblit & Hare (1988):

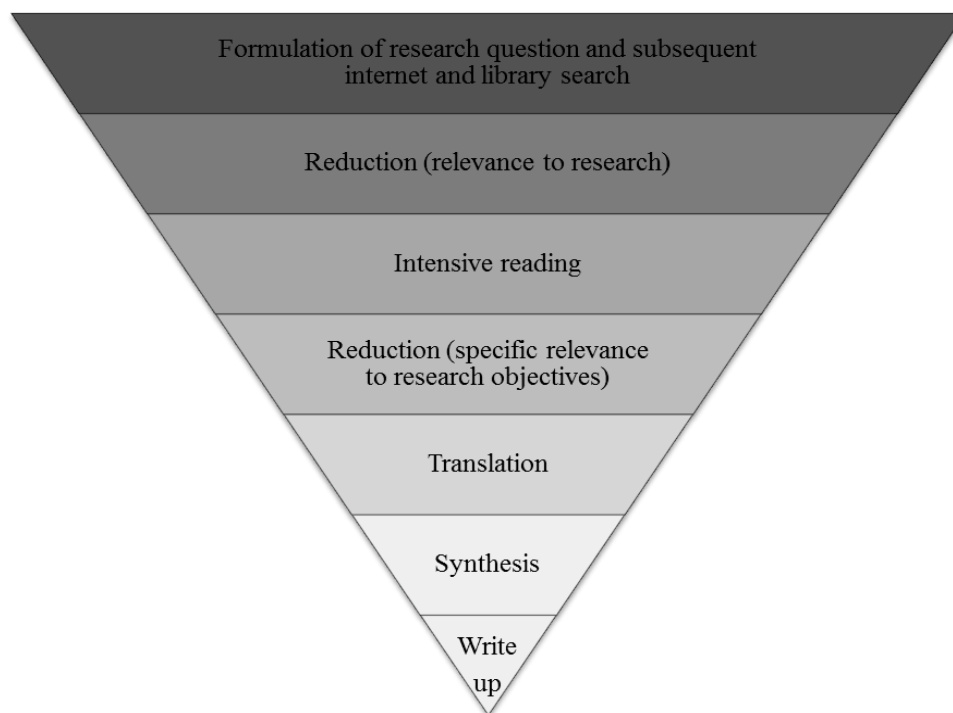


Figure 1. Meta-ethnography process

### 3.3 Ethics

In a meta-ethnography, it is especially important that my own experiences as a B.Ed. student and visual art educator be made explicit, for it is “intricately woven into the account” (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 35) and it would be naïve to assume that my experiences have not influenced my interpretations e.g. the synthesis of the data was directed by various needs that I identified as an education student and an art educator in high schools in South Africa. This resulted in interpretations and inclusions of data that allowed me to modify the art education lesson plan (currently used at some of South Africa’s tertiary institutions) and a teaching framework for novice art teachers that answers to some of the challenges I encountered. The synthesis of the data collected should, thus, be viewed as an interpretation that is open to critique and debate (Noblit & Hare, p. 35).

### 4. Discovering the Angel Within

*“Within every block of wood and stone, there dwells a spirit, waiting to be released. Direct carving is a way of freeing the spirit - my own and that of the stone or wood.”*

Hap Hagood (1946 - )

### 4.1 Introduction

I have used Kieran Egan's (1992) planning framework for imaginative education as the foundation on which I built this section by supplementing it with additional data, with the aim of modifying it to suit a visual analysis lesson for FET students and the development of empathic skills.

This idea of carving away at the mundane to get to students' essence as human beings cannot be accomplished if educators are not equipped to carve away at the *unimaginative* and *unemotional* aspects of education. Students are typically imaginatively alive, yet educators are faced with various curricula and instructional barriers that are aimed at producing measurable learning that suppresses imaginative activity (Egan, 1992, p. 113). The challenge for the educator is to overcome these barriers and ensure that all worksheets / textbooks / tasks allow or lead into thinking about the possible, as well as the actual (p. 49). The engagement process that educators can incorporate into their lessons can be seen in four stages, namely a) identifying transcendent qualities, b) organizing the content into a narrative structure, c) concluding, and d) evaluation.

## **4.2 Identifying Transcendent Qualities**

Tapping into initial attention-grabbing methods for students, Egan (1995) turns to children's embodiment of the archetypal heroes (pp. 80-81). This fascination with characters that embody transcendent human qualities, combined with an affective connection, has the potential for a stimulating introduction and could lay the foundation for the rest of the lesson.

### **4.2.1 Adolescent imagination**

To adapt this step in order to suit students in the FET phase, instructional strategies are needed that will peak the interest of adolescents and grab their attention. Feinstein (2009) provides educators with examples that can answer to this, such as "funny stories, terrible tragedies, and the first snowfall" (p. 18).

Feinstein highlights that the adolescent brain does want to learn more about the world we live in, instead of being distracted easily, but seeks novelty and emotion (Feinstein, 2009). Fortunately, novelty and surprise can be planned for any lesson and playing to the adolescent brain's interest in the unexpected, will ensure a more productive classroom. Varying the tone of your voice, wearing something interesting, adding a scent to the classroom, playing soft music, or reading a poem to set the mood are all strategies to engage the students' senses and arouse their curiosity (p. 21).



#### **4.2.2 Visual analysis knowledge**

Stout (1997) challenges art educators to engage with artworks that touch on controversial issues, such as “violence, poverty, AIDS, environmental devastation, political corruption, and gender, ethnic and various other discriminations” (p. 105). She suggests that educators hold these artworks up for critical examination by incorporating it into dialogic instruction, where a variety of relevant thoughts and information are brought to bear. When considering Feinstein’s (2009) statement regarding novelty and emotion it would be considered a logical deduction that to engage adolescents during the initial stage, educators should consider choosing a stimulus that will arouse curiosity, surprise their students, evoke emotion, stimulate rich discussions and reflect some aspect of students’ social world and their society.

After the initial attention-grabbing stimulus, Hamblen (1995) suggests a questioning strategy that relies on initial reactions, feelings that the art work arouses, and its relation to student experiences. Hamblen (1995) then suggests following up the students’ initial perceptions with the posing of factual questions, such as who, what, where, when, list, describe, name, and locate types of questions. This stage is crucial for students to take a visual inventory for an in-depth and concentrated perceptual experience of the painting. Educators should encourage students to develop their art-related vocabulary and rich descriptions of their perceptions (*ibid*, p. 15). Types of questions to lead the students’ initial access to the artwork are reflected in Appendix A.

#### **4.2.3 Empathic feelings**

For educational purposes, several papers recommend the use of, not only art, but literature (Budin, 2001) or history (Davis, Yeager & Foster, 2001) as tools to stimulate empathy. Endacott and Brooks (2013, p. 47) suggest that students explore the background and historical context through a textbook reading or by watching a documentary segment to introduce them to a historical time, situation, or event. The complete questioning strategy that they propose is reflected in Appendix A and can be modified from the social science context to other subject content. It is based on questions that allow opportunities for students to consider personal similarities and differences between themselves and historical figures; to draw their attention to historical context, and to emphasize the importance of a historical situation (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, pp. 47-48) for some perspective-taking opportunities.

### **4.3 Organizing the content into a narrative structure**

In this second step, Egan (1992, p. 94) suggests that educators focus on the initial access, organising the body of the unit or lesson into a clear narrative structure, humanising the content of the lesson i.e. transforming textbook knowledge into living knowledge, and finally pursuing details of some aspect of the content in exhaustive detail (p. 94).

#### **4.3.1 Adolescent imagination**

From my experience, I have found that teenagers spend a great deal of time either listening, downloading, talking, or singing and dancing along to music. Feinstein (2009) adds that “it calms them, energises them, and reflects and creates their moods. Neuroscientists are finding that music impacts both the academic and emotional well-being of teenagers” (p. 78). Feinstein proposes that teachers play soft music as students enter the room to set the mood, play music from different periods in history and countries, or even analyse songs (p. 79). The same author also suggests “old classroom favourites” (pp. 26-28) to give teens the chance to practice their burgeoning ability to think abstractly while still grounding them firmly in concrete facts and information. Examples of such strategies are activities that examine similarities and differences, the writing of metaphors and analogies, and presenting material non-linguistically.

Feinstein (2009) highlights that teenagers “don’t spend their free time playing tag anymore... Now they verbally engage with their friends on the telephone and in Internet chat sessions for hours, expressing and analysing their thoughts, ideas, and feelings” (p. 75). Communication, therefore, is a crucial tool that can be used in the classroom to allow the arousal of emotions and the sharing of different perspectives. Arendt (1958) wrote about the importance of diverse persons speaking to one another as ‘who’ and not ‘what’ they are and, in so doing, creating an ‘in-between’ among themselves (p.182). Greene (1995) supports the strength of discourse, saying that “individual identity takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue” (p. 41) and that educators should create a context that nurtures this for children, because stories and seeking dialogue, even argument, is a way to give students a voice and to transcend one-dimensional grasping (pp. 68-9). Feinstein (2009, pp. 77-78) suggests that educators instigate debates, or analyse advertisements. Suggestions from Barrett and Clark (1995) are to ask open-ended questions to stimulate student responses; solicit alternative

viewpoints when someone states an opinion; and quote interesting ideas and questions generated in the discussion, and post them to the artwork for other classes to ponder (pp. 12-13).

#### **4.3.2 Visual analysis knowledge**

The second stage in Feldman's (Feldman, 1973, p. 51; Feldman & Woods, 1981, p. 78) visual analysis process is a "formal analysis". After the initial "visual inventory" has been taken, Hamblen (1995) suggests asking students to find relationships and similarities, cite differences and propose reasons for them, and suggest and explain possible meanings (p. 16). These are analytical questions that allow students to explore why and how something has come about and the meaning or result (ibid, p. 16). Questions in this category should build on and expand information gained through the previous category of questions. Examples of such questions can be found in Appendix A.

Educators should always urge students to use the language of art. An example of a strategy that can be incorporated to encourage this, is proposed by Donovan (2004, p. 129): students must not be allowed to take any notes during an art lesson. Educators must then ask them to verbally comment on an artwork by encouraging them to use vocabulary specific to art form's elements. Students will eventually start to explain their impressions in richer detail and more descriptive language (ibid, p. 130).

Nathanson (2006) argues that stories are easier to comprehend; narrative story structure facilitates making connections; and stories facilitate on-line processing and inference-making (pp. 4-7). Stout (1999, p. 230) also recommends incorporating narratives into art lessons, such as artists' written works (e.g. journal entries, letters, etc.). It enhances students' understanding, allows them more information to make informed interpretations, and creates enthusiasm when students make reading recommendations of their own (ibid, p. 230).

Benton (2000, p. 40) suggests a closely related activity: the use of *ekphrasis* (a game that involves reading/writing a poem about an artwork) to develop students' understanding. In Benton's opinion, "this sort of spectating means reading poems that, in turn, are reading paintings and sculptures; and, maybe, doing so form a position of knowing the visual work *before* the poem; or, maybe...*as a result* of the poem; or, maybe, of reading the visual work through, or alongside, or against the poem's reading of it" (p. 40).

Rose (2004) offers a technique to develop students' use of symbol systems to communicate narratives. The task for students is to organize experiences narratively, without the use of words by drawing a diary of their day using only lines and circles. They must then converse with a partner on paper, without saying a word, by telling them a story or solving problems by only using their bodies. Stripped of the rigidity of words, students might begin to understand the way abstract artists, for example, may think (ibid, p. 111). All these techniques promote an understanding of art using various forms of communication.

### **4.3.3 Empathic feelings**

Tools that can engage emotion in adolescents are communication and music. Music can be a powerful memory and emotion builder, and it enables us to make personal connections by expressing a variety of emotions, such as love, triumph, anxiety, or despair. Educators will find that the sharing of an emotional story, showing empathy for the problems students encounter, or playing soft music in the classroom, can create an atmosphere where students feel safe to express their feelings. Educators who encourage healthy expressions "will capitalize on the best of the baffling and boisterous teen outbursts" (Feinstein, 2000, p. 57). More strategies can be found in Appendix A.

Jeffers (2015, p. 19) discusses the function of mirror neurons in our bodies that are useful tools for stimulating empathic feelings. Mirror neurons in the human ventral premotor cortex can be activated when an action is executed by one human being and observed by another. Applied within a classroom setting this suggests that the premotor cortex in a student's brain is activated when observing the art teacher's hands rolling a clay coil or when his/her classmates are sculpting blocks of plaster (p. 19). It is this valuable property, namely embodied simulation, that allows our bodies to mimic that of someone else's and can, therefore, be used as a strategy in cultivating empathy. Instructional activities include having students copy a masterpiece to gain insight into an artist's mind, or mirroring their classmates' facial expressions during presentations (p. 19).

## **4.4 Concluding**

During the concluding stage of the lesson, Egan (1992) suggests planning a suitable closing. Teachers can touch on aspects of the topic or content that has not been explored in depth

during the lesson by, perhaps, posing questions that were still left unanswered and which refer to further research on the topic (p. 100).

#### **4.4.1 Adolescent imagination**

Besides returning to some of the more traditional strategies at this stage of a lesson, like asking students to write a summary of the unit or facilitating cooperative learning (Feinstein, 2009, pp. 26-28), it can also be beneficial to incorporate some active learning strategies. Feinstein recommends enacting simulations, playing charades, or doing energisers (p. 38) to mimic real-world scenarios to stimulate social action. Examples include simulating a mock congress; designing an advertisement that reflects views on a social or political issue; taking a tour and study historic buildings in the local area; teaching a lesson in television-talk-show format; or researching a need in the community (pp. 38-39). These examples of imitative or pretend play can help students to develop mental flexibility in addition to self-/other awareness (Gerdes *et al*, 2011, p. 12). This relates to students feeling and experiencing an emotional closure to a lesson. For example, Braun, Cheang & Shigeta (2005) effectively increased the empathy of nurses and human service workers toward older people by having them put cotton in their ears, tie yellow cellophane around their eyes, put on latex gloves, and then try to read the newspaper, pick things up, and button or zip and unzip clothes. These techniques “help build self/other-awareness, understanding of others, and mental flexibility...[and] can help students literally change their brains, enriching pre-existing shared representational networks...and creating new networks by better understanding people from diverse backgrounds” (Gerdes *et al.*, 2011, pp. 120-121). Developing empathic skills, through the exercises discussed, can allow students to imagine themselves in different contexts and scenarios. This can aid in their interpretations of the various subject matter depicted in artworks, but can also cultivate their sense of empathy which aids in responsible social actions in life.

#### **4.4.2 Visual analysis knowledge**

When interpreting art during Feldman’s (Feldman, 1973, p. 51; Feldman & Woods, 1981, p. 78) third stage, namely “interpretation”, one can only infer the artist's intention. To facilitate students’ interpretations of artworks Feinstein (1995) suggests *clustering*, which is an associative search strategy that facilitates metaphoric interpretation (p. 75). Clustering requires you to quickly spill out intuitive impressions, and it makes impressions visual by capturing them in

words which allow students to see their reaction patterns and generate more. Feinstein compares this activity to looking through four pairs of metaphorical glasses to view the painting (p. 76). The first pair of glasses should urge students to scan the artwork and identify their dominant impression. The second pair of glasses should help students select the painting's main components and cluster their physical characteristics (e.g. colour, line, shape etc.). The third pair of glasses should be used to add clusters of the expressive characteristics and the associations they generate. Finally, the fourth pair of glasses should have students cluster their feelings and thoughts evoked and their associations. Afterwards, students need to create a metaphor by continuing to refer to the painting for "referential adequacy as a reminder that the painting is the stimulus" (p. 77), while considering alternative interpretations and creating a title/metaphoric statement that best conveys what the painting can mean.

Cunliffe (2005) points out that every human being is an expert at reading facial expressions, but this skill is rarely exploited to improve students' abilities to read artworks (p. 129). The idea of scanning artworks as though they were faces, to establish its meaning, is a particularly apt strategy to develop a student's ability to put "mind-to-world" (p.129). This method draws on the expertise that students have already acquired through their social experience. In his research, Cunliffe (2005, pp. 133-135) describes visual strategies for developing interpretive reasoning and responses to deal with the multi-dimensional meaning that artworks articulate, such as mind-to-world approaches through bridging exercises.

At this stage, it is also with "speculative questions" that students can be urged to imagine other possibilities (Hamblen, 1995, p. 16). These are questions that ask what if, imagine different results, what would be the result if, how could and how might, and so forth. The teacher should ask speculative questions that examine meanings, functions, and moods discussed in earlier questions. A list of example questions is presented in Appendix A.

#### **4.4.3 Empathic feelings**

Acting requires stepping "out" of one's personal frame of reference and "into" another, and this is why the dramatic arts can provide valuable methods to cultivate empathy in students (Verducci, 2000, p. 90). In relation to this, Feshbach & Feshbach (2011, p. 90) offer role-playing as an activity in which the person assumes the role of a real, fictional, or historical figure, which appears to be highly effective in increasing both affective and cognitive.

Gerdes *et al.* (2011) also present some insight into strategies that promote and generate opportunities for perspective-taking insights, self/other-awareness, and emotion regulation, such as psychodrama, Gestalt techniques, role-playing, and imitative play. A useful psychodrama intervention is replaying various scenes from students' daily interactions by role-playing a scenario where their reaction was aggressive and then re-playing it using personal emotion regulation and, thus, reacting with more empathy (p. 120).

#### **4.5 Evaluation**

A lack of well-tried and tested evaluation measures (Egan, 1992, p. 100) forces educators to try different techniques to establish whether students' imaginations have been successfully engaged in a lesson. An educator can reflect on which sections students enjoyed most; determine success through students' written work; implement student self-evaluation measures; or facilitate discussions through small group activities (p. 101).

##### **4.5.1 Adolescent imagination**

When it comes to instructional strategies or designing assignments for the end of a lesson, Feinstein (2009) advises that it is important to remember three things about the adolescent brain: a) it is capable of multiprocessing, b) it thrives on challenges, and c) it makes synapses when actively involved with learning (p. 29). She explains this concept with examples of activities that will likely feed off these characteristics, like having the students create a political comic book, look for a philosophy of life in popular songs, analyse a TV show, or allow them to discuss hot topics like dating, parents, sex, drinking, drugs, friends, and work (p. 29). Appendix A shows an extended list of strategies relating to the characteristics of the adolescent brain. A few examples are to have students develop a new strategy for a sports team, view and analyse political debates on TV; create and distribute a survey to their schoolmates and analyse the data; or have the whole class design a code of ethics that represent gender equality (p. 71).

##### **4.5.2 Visual analysis knowledge**

Hamblen (1995) suggests evaluative questioning during this last stage of Feldman and Woods (1981, p. 78) process, namely "evaluation". Educators should ask students to make judgments about the value and significance of a painting based on selected and specified criteria (Hamblen, 1995, p. 17). Evaluative questions build upon ideas and information that have been discussed and developed in the previous stages and can resemble questions such as those

suggested in Appendix A. To further conclude the lesson, educators can ask students to compare their interpretations and judgments to their original responses (ibid, p. 17).

Barrett (1992, p. 123) mentions an activity where students have gone to an art event and afterwards the educator pretended to be a critic who had the task of writing a review for the local newspaper. The educator gave the students the responsibility to tell him what to write and how to write it, while providing them with a word count and space for only one photograph (ibid, p. 123).

### **4.5.3 Empathic feelings**

After various strategies have been used to engage students' emotions and develop a sense of empathy, it is important to end the lesson with a reflective activity. Endacott & Brooks (2013, p. 53) argue that this final stage is necessary for the prior cultivation of "understanding" to be realized. Students must be guided through the process of using their understanding of the past to inform their thoughts, emotions, and actions in the present (p. 53) and future. Examples of such activities are classroom debates (Brooks, 2011) and questioning strategies that allow for reflections (Endacott and Brooks, 2013, pp. 54 - 55). The questions should prompt students to develop a stronger awareness of needs around them and a sense of agency to respond to these needs. The suggested questioning strategy is reflected in Appendix A and can be modified from the social science context to other subject content.

## **5. Releasing the Angel**

*"Releasing the angel from the stone does not imply an escape from this world, but a transcendence that allows a human to become more humane."*

Dornehl Kitching (1985 - )

### **5.1 Introduction**

Table 1 shows the synthesis (teaching framework) that led me to the creation of a new FET visual art education lesson plan in Table 2 that can be used for South African art educator training. After a critical review of the data, and to make it appropriate for its purpose and context, I have made the following modifications:

- Inclusion of a skills progression column (Department of Education, 2011, pp. 14-15) in the lesson plan.
- Inclusion of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive levels in the lesson plan (p. 41).



- A modification of Egan’s (1992, p. 94) framework. In keeping with its intended purpose, Egan’s first stage is used in my own framework as a starter- or stimulus stage. Within Egan’s second stage, I have separated the sub-category “initial access” (p. 94) to form a complete stage on its own, considering its appropriateness as a ‘first step’ in a lesson and to parallel Feldman’s (1973, 1981) description / identification stage.

Table 1 *Proposed FET Teaching Framework for Visual Culture Studies*

Visual Analysis	Engaging the imagination and emotions	Engagement activities
	Identifying transcendent qualities	<u>Attention-grabbing stimulus:</u> Novelty, emotion, physical senses, arouse curiosity
Description	Organizing the content into a narrative structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial access</li> </ul>	<u>Artwork:</u> Expressive; rich content; stimulating  <u>Context:</u> Textbook reading, documentary segment  <u>Questioning strategy:</u> Draw attention to historical and cultural context
Formal Analysis	----- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structuring the body of the unit or lesson</li> <li>• Humanizing the content</li> <li>• Pursuing details</li> </ul>	<u>Stimulus:</u> Music, communication  <u>Communication:</u> Debates, analyse printed media, blogging, group- and class discussions, storytelling, <i>ekphrasis</i> , social interaction, emotional stories; discuss social issues (various perspectives); non-verbal  <u>Questioning strategy:</u> Open-ended questions, solicit alternative viewpoints, quote interesting idea for class to ponder  <u>Simulation:</u>

		Mimicry, film
Interpretation	Concluding	<p><u>Traditional strategies:</u>          Summary, cooperative learning, assignment objectives</p> <p><u>Active learning:</u>          Simulations, charades, energisers, design stickers, recycling, television-talk-show format, trivia-game-format, field trips, role-playing, psychodrama, Gestalt techniques, imitative play</p> <p><u>Questioning strategy:</u>          Speculative questions</p> <p><u>Other:</u>          Clustering, bridging exercises</p>
Evaluation	Evaluation	<p><u>Analysis exercises:</u>          Songs, television shows, political debates, survey data</p> <p><u>Questioning strategy:</u>          Evaluative, reflective</p> <p><u>Other:</u>          Discussions, debates, strategic planning, design code of ethics, design survey and collect data, writing a review</p>

Table 2

*FET Visual Culture Studies Lesson Plan*

<b>University of X</b>			Student name:	
<b>Teaching Practice:</b>			Student number:	
<b>VISUAL ART: Topic 3 (Visual Culture Studies)</b>				
School:		Grade:	Date:	
Theme:		Artist:	Title of work:	
<b>Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive levels</b>	<b>Content knowledge</b>	<b>Engagement</b>		<b>CAPS: Skills progression</b>
		Stimulus:		
Knowledge	Description:	Initial access:		
Comprehension Application	Formal Analysis:	Organisation of content:		
Analysis Synthesis	Interpretation:	Drawing conclusions:		
Evaluation	Evaluation:	Evaluation:		
<i>Assessment:</i>			<i>Resources:</i>	

## 5.2 Conclusion

I have argued for the development of an aesthetic literacy in South African art education, where students' knowledge, along with their imaginations and empathic skills are being cultivated. The suggested lesson plan and teaching framework was designed to aid art educators in developing students' aesthetic literacy, so that they can experience a greater awareness and understanding of the world around them.

Some considerations for the implementation of such a framework is that an “evoker and stimulator of imaginations also requires...that teachers be imaginatively energetic” (Egan, 1992, p. 156). Like Dewey (2005), I believe that people who genuinely understand teaching realise that it entails considerably more than only having knowledge of subject matter and pedagogical tools. It requires energy and a teaching style that not only transfers knowledge, but engages the imaginations and emotions of the students. This has become especially significant in a country like South Africa, where the need to produce socially responsible young citizens who can empathize with others, has become a matter of urgency.

My intention is to use this research to improve my own teaching practice, as well as deliver it to platforms where various art education communities can access it. This could act as a springboard for further research; implementation into art education practices; or simply promote the advantages of art education. I will also pursue further empirical research to establish greater validity and reliability regarding the effectiveness of my proposed framework on students' empathic skills. This could support my theoretical research in a way that will make it presentable to the South African Education Department, and ultimately be incorporated into the teacher training system.

## References

- Arendt, H. (1958). *Vie human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Barrett, T. (1992). Criticizing art with children. *Art Education: Elementary*, 115-129.
- Barrett, T., & Clark, G. (1995). *Lessons for Teaching Art Criticism*. Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University, 2805 East 10th Street, Suite 120, Bloomington, IN 47405.
- Bell, L. A., & Desai, D. (2011). Imagining otherwise: Connecting the arts and social justice to envision and act for change: Special Issue Introduction. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 44(3), 287-295.
- Benton, M. (2000). *Studies in the Spectator Role: Literature, Painting, and Pedagogy*. Psychology Press.
- Braun, K. L., Cheang, M., & Shigeta, D. (2005). Increasing knowledge, skills, and empathy among direct care workers in elder care: A preliminary study of an active-learning model. *The Gerontologist*, 45(1), 118-124.
- Brooks, S. (2011). Historical empathy as perspective recognition and care in one secondary social studies classroom. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 39(2), 166-202.
- Budin, M. L. (2001). Tea and empathy. *School Library Journal*, 47, 45-46.
- Cunliffe, L. (2005) Art and Worldview: Escaping the Formalist and Collectivist Labyrinth. In Hickman, R. (Ed.). *Critical studies in art and design education*. Intellect Books.
- Davis, O. L., Yeager, E. A., & Foster, S. J. (2001). *Historical empathy and perspective taking in the social studies*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Department of Basic Education. (2011). *Visual Arts Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement: Further education and Training Phase Grades 10 – 12*. South Africa
- Dewey, J. (2005). *Art as experience*. Penguin.
- Dewey, J., Boydston, J. A., & Edel, A. (2008). *The Later Works, 1925-1953: 1932 (Vol. 7)*. SIU Press.
- Dewey, J., Morris, D., & Shapiro, I. (1993). *The political writings*. Hackett Publishing.
- Egan, K. (1992). *Imagination in Teaching and Learning: The Middle School Years*. University of Chicago Press, 11030 S. Langley Ave., Chicago, IL 60628 (clothbound: ISBN-0-226-19033-1).
- Endacott, J., & Brooks, S. (2013). An updated theoretical and practical model for promoting historical empathy. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 8(1), 41-57.

- Feinstein, H. (1995). Interpreting Paintings Metaphorically: Edward Hopper's House by the Railroad. In Barrett, T., & Clark, G. (Eds.). *Lessons for Teaching Art Criticism*. (pp. 74-79). Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University.
- Feinstein, S. G. (Ed.). (2009). *Secrets of the teenage brain: Research-based strategies for reaching and teaching today's adolescents*. Corwin Press.
- Feldman, E. B. (1973). The teacher as model critic. *Journal of aesthetic education*, 7(1), 50-57.
- Feldman, E. B., & Woods, D. (1981). Art criticism and reading. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 15(4), 75-95.
- Feshbach, N. D., & Feshbach, S. (2011). 7 Empathy and Education. The social neuroscience of empathy, 85-97.
- Freire, P. (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Books.
- Gale, R. (2005). Aesthetic Literacy and the 'Living of Lyrical Moments' [Rowan University Faculty Center]. Retrieved 15 May 2016, from [http://www.rowan.edu/provost/facultycenter/campus\\_initiatives/Aesthetic%20Literacy%20Gale%202005.html](http://www.rowan.edu/provost/facultycenter/campus_initiatives/Aesthetic%20Literacy%20Gale%202005.html)
- Gerdes, K. E., Segal, E. A., Jackson, K. F., & Mullins, J. L. (2011). Teaching empathy: A framework rooted in social cognitive neuroscience and social justice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(1), 109-131.
- Greene, M. (1977). Imagination and aesthetic literacy. *Art Education*, 30(6), 14-20.
- Greene, M. (1977). Toward wide-awakeness: An argument for the arts and humanities in education. *Teachers College Record*, 79(1), 119-125.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. The Jossey-Bass Education Series. Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104.
- Hamblen, K. A. (1986). Exploring contested concepts for aesthetic literacy. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 20(2), 67-76.
- Hamblen, K. A. (1995) A Potpourri of Questions for Criticizing Realistic Paintings. In Barrett, T., & Clark, G. (Eds.). *Lessons for Teaching Art Criticism*. (pp. 14-18). Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University.
- Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge University Press.

- Hunter, M. (2013). Imagination may be more important than knowledge: The eight types of imagination we use. *Review of Contemporary Philosophy*, 12, 113.
- Jeffers, C. S. (2009). Within connections: Empathy, mirror neurons, and art education. *Art Education*, 62(2), 18-23.
- Kaag, J. (2014). *Thinking through the imagination: Aesthetics in human cognition*. Fordham University Press.
- Kieran, M. (2003). In search of a narrative. In Kieran, M. & Lopes, D. (Eds.), *Imagination, philosophy, and the arts* (pp.69-87). Psychology Press.
- Nathanson, S. (2006). Harnessing the power of story: Using narrative reading and writing across content areas. *Reading Horizons*, 47(1), 1.
- Noblit, G. W., & Hare, R. D. (1988). *Meta-ethnography: Synthesizing qualitative studies* (Vol. 11). Sage.
- Reimer, B. (1967). *Development and trial in a junior and senior high school of a two-year curriculum in general music*. Washington, DC: US Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research.
- Rendlemann, J., Rendleman, J., & Noddings, N. (1986). Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. In *The Personalist Forum* (Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 147-150). University of Illinois Press.
- Rose, K. (2004). Everything changes: Transformative thinking through aesthetic experience. In Diaz, G., & McKenna, M. (Eds.), *Teaching for aesthetic experience: The art of learning* (pp. 101-113). Peter Lang.
- Simpson, D. J., Jackson, M. J., & Aycock, J. C. (2004). *John Dewey and the art of teaching: Toward reflective and imaginative practice*. Sage Publications.
- Spear, L. P. (2000). The adolescent brain and age-related behavioral manifestations. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 24(4), 417-463.
- Stout, C. J. (1997). Multicultural reasoning and the appreciation of art. *Studies in Art Education*, 38(2), 96-111.
- Stout, C. J. (1999). Artists as writers: Enriching perspectives in art appreciation. *Studies in Art Education*, 40(3), 226-241.

## Appendix A: Additional Instructional Strategies

### 1. Adolescent imagination

Feinstein (2009:21) attention-grabbing strategies for the *first stage*:

- Tell a riddle
- Play a popular song and ask students why they like it (inquiring about interests will capture their attention)
- Show video clip of trendy commercial
- Share personal story from own school days
- Bring candy as a writing (ex. metaphor creation) prompt
- Pass around clay, feathers, packing foam etc. Arouse curiosity and tactile senses
- Move class arrangement periodically
- Mix it up; have students stand up when they respond to key ideas
- Start a service for a (ex. Immigrant) adolescent in your community. Opportunity to contribute directly to a peer is meaningful, specific, and unique.
- Surprise them with a celebration for work well done.

Feinstein 2009:29 offers strategies for the *fourth stage*:

- Think out loud exercises as they decide on topic for writing assignments
- Form pairs/small groups and put students in charge to teach their classmates
- Rewrite a scene from Shakespeare against modern day setting (then determine similarities and differences between two versions)
- Seek out members of the community to interview (elderly, employers, city council member etc.)
- Publish a class newspaper from a contemporary, historical, or fictional perspective
- Define and discuss gender bias: constructing definition gives added meaning to concept. (p. 71)
- Debate effects of gender on self-esteem and career opportunities. (p. 71)

### 2. Instructional strategies: Visual analysis knowledge

Initial access questioning proposed by Hamblen, 1995:15 for the *first stage*:

- What is the subject matter? Describe the subject matter. Is there primary subject matter and secondary subject matter? Explain.
- What colours (or lines, shapes, textures) are present? Describe where these colours (or lines, shapes, textures) are located.
- What size is the painting?
- When and where was it painted? Who painted it? (Extrinsic)
- Describe the setting in which this painting is now located. Describe the settings in which this painting have been located. (Extrinsic)



- Describe the audience and appreciators of this painting. (Extrinsic)

Speculative questioning proposed by Hamblen, 1995:15 - 16 for the *second stage*:

- What do you think is the main meaning, function, or mood of this painting? What aspects of this painting support your statement? Why do you think the artist selected this subject matter?
- What effect do the colours (or lines, shapes, textures) repeated throughout the painting have on the meaning?
- How does the current setting of this painting relate to its meaning, function, or mood? Why is this considered a realistic painting? Are there aspects of this painting that are not realistic? If so, what are they?
- Is the size of this painting significant? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Who do you think would like/dislike this painting? Why or why not?

Factual questioning proposed by Hamblen, 1995:16-17 for the *third stage*:

- What would be the result if portions (specify) of this painting were deleted?
- What would be the result if portions (specify) were moved (specify where) within this painting?
- What would be the results if this painting had been done in colour (or line, texture, shape) opposites? How would these opposites change the painting's meanings, functions, or moods?
- Imagine that a different artist (specify) had painted this. What would be different? What might be the same?
- How might the meanings, functions, or moods of this painting change if it were placed in another environment (specify)?
- How could this painting be made more serious, humorous, scary, peaceful?
- Imagine that you could move the subject matter of this painting to another historical time (specify) or another place (specify). Would the subject matter "fit" in that time or that place? Why or why not?
- How might the audience change if the subject matter were different (specify).
- How could you make this painting less realistic?
- How could you make this painting more realistic?
- What aspects of this painting could be changed without changing its meanings, functions, or moods?
- What aspects could not be changed without drastically changing its meanings, functions, or moods?

Evaluative questioning proposed by Hamblen, 1995:7 for the *fourth stage*:

- Based on this painting's meanings, functions, or moods, decide if this is an effective painting.
- Judge the value of this painting based on its subject matter, colour, mood (specify).
- Does this painting have value in your life? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
- Is this a good example of this type (specify) of realism? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that the artist achieved his or her goals? Why or why not?
- What significance might this painting have in the life work of the artist? (Extrinsic).
- Judge the value of this painting based on its intended audience (Extrinsic).
- Judge the value of this painting based on its relationship to its current setting. Do you think this painting has significance in terms of the history of art? Explain. (Extrinsic).
- Do you believe this painting has an impact on its audience (specify type of impact, type of audience)? Explain.

Critical thinking skills presented by Stout (1995:173) to be used to guide lesson planning, serve as assessment criteria or as a useful “checklist” for educators during the *fourth stage* to establish the achievement of these skills in the lesson:

1. Employ the skills of meticulous observation
2. Draw inferences and form logical interpretations based on observation, reading, and other forms of communication
3. Use the vocabulary of the discipline appropriately
4. Transfer learning from one situation to another
5. Compare and contrast
6. See and discover relationships
7. Make informed decisions and reasonable choices
8. Support opinions and wage arguments with credible facts, information, examples, explanation, descriptive details, illustrations, quotations, incidents
9. Distinguish between substantiated and unsubstantiated opinion, and separate relevant from irrelevant information
10. Weigh meanings and evaluate the credibility of sources
11. Analyse information and ideas and understand their relationships
12. Synthesize or put ideas together to form a new idea or concept
13. Recognize the plausibility of more than one correct answer or solution to a problem
14. Identify fundamental problems and recognize major issues
15. Perceive the complexity of an issue or concept
16. Generate solutions to problems
17. Withhold judgment/evaluation until valid and adequate evidence has been established
18. Make evaluations based on fairly established standards
19. Predict

20. Revise and rethink

### 3. Instructional strategies: Empathic skills

Endacott & Brooks (2013:47-48) questioning strategy for the *first stage*:

*To consider personal similarities and differences between students and historical figures*

- Have you ever had to make a difficult decision? What made the decision difficult? How did you handle it?
- How do you think you are similar to or different from Susan B. Anthony?
- Do you think Harry Truman was the kind of person who would back down from a fight?"
- How would you describe the situation this historical figure faces? Have you ever been in a similar situation?

*To draw attention to historical context*

- How was New England changing in the first half of the 19th century?
- How was life in China after Mao similar to or different from life in America today?
- What are five key events that you think led up to Protestant Reformation?
- How does this particular situation reflect what was going on in this society at that time?

*To emphasize the importance of a historical situation*

- Why do you think we are going to spend three class periods studying the lives of mill workers?
- Why do you think it is important to think about what we might have in common with John Smith?

Feinstein (2009:57) strategies to promote expression of feelings during the *second stage*:

- Teens find interactive technology fun and exhilarating (social media etc.)
- Celebrate achievement in your class
- Never ridicule a student's question or comment
- Allow for peer-/group support during 'seatwork'
- Communicate honestly to students that you value them
- Playing music as students enter the classroom that relates to the lesson's content

Feinstein (2009:63) strategies to promote expression of feelings during the *second stage*:

- Encourage students to look at a social issue from a variety of perspective eg. Let students re-write Cinderella story from perspectives of ‘evil’ stepsisters; act out skits of discrimination etc.
- Allow for social interactions (eg. group) not only in strictly academic setting but just for the sake of allowing them to talk about their emotions
- Explore current social topics and help students discover where they stand on controversial issues through discussion, debate, and journaling.
- Prod adolescents to examine inconsistencies in their actions and values through friendly discussions.
- Have students stand on a continuum of Agree and Disagree, and then reflect on why they took their stance.
- Provide class mentors for some students – relationship building leads to positive emotional feelings.

Endacott & Brooks (2013:54-55) offers a questioning strategy for the *fourth stage*:

*To invite reflection on the context of present perspectives*

- How has the Vietnam War shaped the way Americans think about war today?
- How are the perspectives of people in the past similar or different from the perspectives we hold today? What are the factors that influence these differences?
- How has our view of this historical situation changed over time?

*To consider parallels between the past and the present*

- How are 19th century explanations for poverty similar to or different from how we understand the causes of poverty today?
- How might this event have been different if it had happened today?
- Do you think anyone is experiencing a circumstance like this historical character today?

*To invite moral judgments and a disposition to act for the good of others*

- Do you believe that Truman was right in deciding to drop two atomic bombs? Why or why not?
- What aspect of this unit was the most difficult for you to deal with?
- Why is it important to study the lives of people who lived in the past? How can that change the way we see people today?
- How do we determine what was right or wrong in the past? Can something be right in the past and wrong in the present?
- How can your knowledge of this historical figure’s situation inform or change your view of the world today?