

If You Really Knew Me: Family Art Studio at Escalante

Summary of Framework Arts' Family Art Studio

Family Art Studio is a unique parent/child art class offered in the evening at Escalante Elementary by a local arts non-profit, Framework Arts. As the Director of Framework Arts, who also happens to be the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program Visual Arts Instructor at Escalante, I have organized and taught these evening classes for the last three years. The classes run from 6-8 weeks for 2-3 hours each Wednesday night. Interested students must be accompanied by at least one parent or teen sibling, although many families bring multiple family members including additional parents, aunts and uncles, or grandparents. Families can bring any younger children from the household as well. Classes typically have had between 18-24 participants. Dinner is included at the start of each class.



These parent/child collaborative classes offer the following opportunities for the participants and the school:

- An invitation for parents and children to **work together** to build personal narratives.
- A structured environment for parents to spend **quality time** in the school setting and build a sense of belonging in the school community.
- Students working as teachers and **showcasing** their skills and expertise in the art room
- Parents and children **investigating** together critical issues related to representation and storytelling specific to their experience.
- Parents and children **negotiating** a collaborative art making process.

Framework Arts utilizes a curriculum-building approach that invites participants to use contemporary art practices and objects as sources of inspiration for observation, discussion, and hands on production about themes relevant to their experiences. Past topics have included family portraiture and movement/migration stories.



School Demographics

Escalante Elementary is a Title I school located in northwest Salt Lake. In 2017/2018 there were 458 students enrolled. 86% are racial/ethnic minority students, with 85% low income and 52% English language learners. More than 30 countries and 20 languages are represented.

If You Really Knew Me: 2017 Class with University of Utah Research Team

The theme for the spring of 2017 class was "If You Really Knew Me, You Would Know..." This session was shaped in collaboration with a research team from the University of Utah, supported by BTSALP, consisting of Karen Tao and Kritzia Merced. Families worked over six weeks of classes to create an artist book that explored questions of personal, family and racial identity. Each weekly class consisted of the following parts:

- A theme in the form of a question.

- A recorded Walk and Talk where the parent and child would use the week's thematic question and additional sub questions to record a conversation which answered the questions. This discussion was then used as content for the artwork.
- Sources of inspiration which were examples of visual art that related to the weeks' theme or examples of artists exploring that theme. Participants performed a visual inventory process and a group discussion about what they saw, how they think it related to the theme, and what aspects of it they wanted to incorporate into their own process.
- Time to work on new pages for the artist book.

The sub questions under "If you really knew me, you would know..." helped explore the following weekly sub-themes of telling stories, recognition, memory, communication, stereotypes, assumptions, authenticity, and representation. Samples of questions:

- How did you choose my name? What were your parents like? What was/is school like for you? What is it like being your age?
- How would you describe who we are to someone who never met us? How should we represent what we look like? How would you describe my skin color?
- What is one of your favorite memories about our family so far? What are some difficult things people in our family have experienced? What are some of the positive things people in our family have experienced?
- How do you think our family talks about things that are hard? What are some of the topics we have trouble discussing?
- How do you think people who don't know us see our family? How would they describe us?
- In order to really know you what do I need to know?

At the conclusion of the class, each family had utilized a variety of artmaking approaches, such as collage, watercolor, printmaking and photography. Using these, they created a unique artist book that answered the questions from above with images and text.

We gathered data from a variety of sources including:

- Recorded family member interviews.
- Weekly written questionnaires that family members used to write notes and gather ideas in response to the questions.
- Weekly visual art pieces compiled into the artists' books.
- Videotaped visual inventory group discussions during the classes.
- Final family interviews conducted by University of Utah faculty members Karen Tao and Kritzia Merced.

The research that Karen Tao and Kritzia Merced conducted focused on this specific research question: How do racial/ethnic minority students and their parents think about and express their identities through the process and content of artmaking?

Family Art Studio also presents opportunities for other rich areas of research around school success. These included parental/school



engagement and exploration of parent/student relationships through art making.

Ultimately, the 2017 *If You Really Knew Me* class offered Escalante students and their parents an opportunity to come together for an experience that many of them indicated was a unique and in-depth co-exploration of their familial relationship and their place in the community. This model of art instruction with parents and students working together provides rich opportunities for further research around topics of not only racial/ethnic personal identity but family learning within the school setting.

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