

as in the case of testing, optimism itself, when coupled with institutional support, may become self-fulfilling.

⁴It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss other possible ways that a discipline-based approach to art instruction could be interpreted and implemented, i.e., not using general education characteristics as the model for evaluation and curriculum development.

⁵DBAE is a theory of art instruction; it is not a curriculum *per se*. However, curricula that are designated as discipline-based tend to have the characteristics of general education curricula. To date, discipline-based designated curricula stress structure, sequence, and the organisation of content that is simplified, manageable, and noncontroversial (McReynolds, 1990).

⁶ARTSPROPEL, supported by Harvard's Project Zero, The Rockefeller Commission, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools, is a qualitative, standardised evaluation program which assesses student learning through journals, portfolios, and student initiated long-term projects (Gitomer, Grosh, & Price, 1992). ARTSPROPEL is primarily implemented in selected Pittsburgh public schools and is limited to studio-based art learning; however, its use of qualitative forms of assessment have been seen as having implications for the use of more "authentic" forms of assessment in other subject areas (Gitomer et al., 1992).

Deep-Seated Culture: Understanding Sitting

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ABSTRACT

Similar to the way that our culture influences how we interpret the world, the way that we sit in a chair and the type of chair that we are in positions what we see and how we are seen. Environmental cues communicate information through which we establish context and define a situation (Rapoport, 1982, p. 56). In this paper I examined the ways in which chairs (defined as that which is underneath us when "sitting") and sitting (defined as the infinite ways that we sustain our bodies in a bent position ranging from squatting, kneeling, reclining, or the lotus position) reflect cultural values and influence what we learn, through disempowering or empowering us. Based on this examination, I collaborated with poet, Amy Klauke, to develop a multicultural and environmental art unit that promotes understanding of the diverse ways that people organize space, time, meaning, and communication. The art unit described in the second half of this paper could serve as a curriculum model in which other objects of material culture (i.e., entrances, eating paraphernalia, etc.) are experientially deconstructed to reveal culturally constructed meanings.

Chairs and Sitting: An Environmental Form of Nonverbal Communication Reflecting Cultural Constructs of Time and Space

Spatial arrangements shape the content of our learning and knowing. Edward Hall (1966) referred to this as the "hidden dimension." in his book, *Hidden Dimension*. In our central nervous system we encode a model of the world for a particular time and place. "Space and time constitute the two basic dimensions of any of the activities that we may carry out in a living culture, whether interactive or noninteractive" (Poyatos, 1983, p. 203). We perceive, think, and act according to our internalized models of time and space.

Garber (1991), Chadwick (1990), Parker and Pollock (1981), and Berger (1973), among other social theorists, provide several art critical/historical examples that illustrate how "our knowledge and our personal beliefs and choices are influenced (if not largely determined) by the larger social ideologies of our era" (Garber, p. 53). Social ideologies influence how physical environments are arranged and understood. For example, chairs aligned in a row facing front suggest an emphasis on authority and order. Sitting in a circle on the ground conveys nonhierarchical social order, and a connectedness to the earth and each other. Politically dominant and economically secure members of a society institute a model of time and space through many channels, such as educational mandates. The model that they institutionalize may contrast with other people's traditional beliefs about time and space, and limit everyone's range of perceived choices. John Berger argued that even what is seen is a choice, and that "we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (1973, p. 9). Cultural understandings of time and space determine what we choose to see, and define our understanding of the relationships between things.

According to McDermott, "both the environment and the brain are socially constructed" (1983, p. 189). Berleant's "participatory model of experience," characterizes environment as "a field in which there is a reciprocal action of organism on environment and environment on organism and in which there is not

real demarcation between them" (Berleant, 1985, p. 119). The relationships of time and space within our cultural understanding of the environment set the parameters for choosing what we will process, thereby affecting what and how we learn. We choose according to our social construction of meaning and communication. The specific nature of choices reflect the culture of the people concerned. Often conflicts of meanings and communication arise in individual and group interactions because of misunderstandings about how others organize their space and time in their environment. Even an activity seemingly as universal as sitting has deep-seated cultural implications.

The Impact of Nonverbal Environmental Cues on Learning

Nonverbal communication through socially constructed environments of culturally defined space and time influences what we learn. For example, Spindler described the school environment of Sisala children as an "artificial, isolated, unrealistic, ritualized environment" (1987, p. 331). The teachers enforced an authoritarian rigidity, demanding that children sit or stand according to the rituals when answering the teachers' questions (Spindler, 1987, p. 330). Some Sisala children may become literate in this way but fail to acquire other skills which are more useful in the Sisala culture. These words of a Sisala adult who attended school and now teaches in his home village demonstrate the unhappiness of this literate man:

When I went to school, I was told that if I got good marks and studied hard, I would be somebody, somebody important. I even thought I would go to America or England. I would still like to go, but I don't think of these things very often because it hurts too much. You see me here drinking and perhaps you think I don't have any sense. I don't know. I don't know why I drink. But I know in two days' time, I must go back and teach school...I am alone; I am nobody. (Spindler, p. 331)

One can't help but ponder if another socially constructed school environment may have encouraged him to make different life choices, which might have enabled him to be happy in his adult life.

McDermott referred to students "learning not to read" because of the teacher-student battles over the use of time and space in the classroom. In his ethnographic study of African-American children in United States' public schools, the politics of the classroom were visibly conveyed through the teacher's position in relation to seating arrangements that marked the status of each child. McDermott (1987) found that, "from the first to the last grade, the teacher attempts to dictate when and where a child should speak or move" (p. 201). McDermott, attributing the relationship of a student's failure to learn to read to conflicting nonverbal communication between teachers and students, cites Bateson's classic distinction of communication as involving "not only the transfer of information, but also the imposition of a relationship" (McDermott, p. 180). Any words that are spoken will be heard or not heard, attended to or not attended to, according to the message of "relationship sent off before any words were spoken" (McDermott, p. 181). What is learned or not learned is influenced by "who communicates with whom, under what conditions, how, when, where, and in what context" (Rapoport, 1980, p. 13). Thus, we can surmise that environments are culture specific and greatly influence what is learned.

Birdwhistell's experimental studies conducted in the 1960s indicated that only 35% of messages are carried verbally and the remaining 65% nonverbally (1970). With this in mind, it is revealing to compare the practice of business orientation seminars for Japanese adults in Japan on nonverbal communication to McDermott's statement about American Japanese children "soaring over mobility barriers and appear[ing] to have escaped pariah status because of their mastery of the American school system" (McDermott, p. 203). In a 1988 Japanese seminar, young adults were taught to study nonverbal dimensions of communication in order to "lead more rewarding and comfortable lives" (Ishii, 1988, p. 4). Perhaps Japanese cultural traditions of concern for understanding nonverbal communication have been passed down to Japanese American children and have provided them

with skills to interpret and assimilate nonverbal behavior expected in United States' schools.

Each of us perceives each setting, which is comprised of time, space, communication, and meaning, differently. Evaluations in educational settings are usually on the teacher's terms, that is, based on the teacher's sense of how students should act and what they should be learning in a specific space and time. While the effects of choices and our perception of what choices exist are largely social, the "cues on the basis of which the social situations are judged are environmental" (Rapoport, 1982, p. 56).

Space, Time, Communication, and Meaning

The relationship between the designed environment and social organization is described by Rapoport (1980) as consisting of four interrelated variables: space, time, communication, and meaning (pp. 7-44). Rapoport (1982) differentiated between communication as "among people" and meaning as "nonverbal communication from the environment to people" (p. 178). According to Rapoport (1980) the organization of space reflects the activities, values, and purposes of individuals or groups of people (p. 11). People with different cultural orientations understand space in different ways; space can refer to physical, social, or conceptual distances. Poyatos (1983), in his interdisciplinary overview of nonverbal communication, attributed the insightful development of research in proxemics to anthropologist, Edward T. Hall (1966), and defined proxemics as "people's conception, use, and structuration of space, from their built or natural surrounding to the distances consciously or unconsciously maintained in personal interaction" (p. 204). Rapoport (1980) defined physical space as "the three-dimensional extension of the world around us, the intervals, distances, and relationships between people and people, people and things, and things and things" (p. 11). Both Rapoport (1982) and Poyatos (1983) argued that we derive meaning and convey intentions from proxemic behaviors, and from the design, materials, colors, forms, size, method

of construction, and use of an object (such as a chair—my emphasis) (Rapoport, pp. 55-85 & Poyatos, pp. 205-212).

Time, one of the four variables of the designed environment identified by Rapoport (1982), can be linear or cyclical, future, present, or past oriented; or it can be various combinations of these perspectives (p. 179). How we perceive time influences how we value it and the tempos and rhythms of our activities. Time is represented within a society by how it is divided into units, recorded, and used in human activities. Physical spaces reflect a group's perception of time (Rapoport, 1982, pp. 179-180). Chronemics refers to "our conceptualization and handling of time as a biopsychological and cultural element lending specific characteristics to social relationships and to many events contained within the communication stream, from linguistic syllables and flitting gestures to meaningful glances and silences" (Poyatos, 1983, p. 210).

Nonverbal communication is transmitted through: the organization of meaning reflected in objects; the organization of space expressed through the distance and position of objects and people in a space; and the organization of time, symbolized by the types of objects and uses of spaces. Spaces "direct the action patterns of humans; they begin to dictate mode and frequency of communication—on all its levels" (LaRusso, 1977, p. 127).

Individuals or groups sometimes conflict with the dominant culture's construction of the four environmental variables of time, meaning, space, and communication and may, as a result, feel isolated or oppressed. Sometimes these variables are used by institutions or powerful individuals to control people to such an extent that oppression is felt by a majority of people (such as by school children). "The codes are subtle. . . . The minutiae of nonverbal communication very often function as markers for ascription" (McDermott, p. 176).

Examples of Ideologies Embedded in Types of Chairs and Ways of Sitting

Examples of spatial codes for ideological statements frequently used in nonverbal communication are chairs and sitting. Hodge and Kress (1988) provided an example analysis of "the ideology of ways of sitting," in a discussion of a photograph of a meeting chaired by Mary Quant, a famous textile designer. They discussed it in terms of the messages conveyed by the psychological and physical space between people sitting on chairs at a table (pp. 61-63). The analysis is similar to linguistic analysis except that the authors used terms developed in the field of nonverbal communication.

The chair, broadly defined, represents an object in the environment which most people will make decisions about throughout their life. The choice may be determined by how one identifies their "place" within one's culture, and what alternatives a person believes that they have. How one relates to the arrangement of chairs within a space influences one's decisions. Rapoport (1982) provided an example of an architect, trained in the social sciences, who in order to identify his clients' status and self-confidence, used information obtained by what his clients did with the chairs that he had prearranged against the wall before they entered his office (p. 68). Rapoport stated that, the architect felt that "the results supported his assumptions and he found the system most helpful" in understanding his clients (1982, p. 68).

It is common in Western culture to refer to chairs as having human body parts—legs, back, arms, and feet. In the Victorian era chairs were often draped with fabric so that the legs would not arouse any associations with the human body (Degler, 1980, p. 249). "The chair reflects aspects of the society that are very closely associated with attitudes, values, and emotional sets or biases" (Alexander, 1975, p. 4). The types of chair within a society convey much about the values of that society. For example, in the United States there are electric chairs, beauty chairs, dentist chairs, conversational chairs, love-seats, highchairs, and so on. In New Guinea there are fertility chairs. Japanese use

kneeling mats in their tea ceremonies. Chairs often denote power like "seat of power", "seat of justice," or "seat in Parliament". The word "pharaoh" originally meant throne, and later became associated with Egyptian rulers (Stone, 1976, p. 38). The Madonna and Child icon was known throughout the High Middle Ages as the "throne of wisdom." The Madonna is seated on a throne, but is also herself a throne. Of course there is the sexist term "chairman" that is typically situated in a specific space in relationship to the other chairs which committee members occupy, and denotes the highest position in the group.

Throughout time and in diverse societies the placement and space between chairs has conveyed status, religious beliefs, and political ideologies. My husband speaks with pride in having been "First Chair French Horn" player in his high school band. Arabic mosques had one seat, the maqsura, for the Sultan or Caliph which was surrounded by open space to denote his importance (Kuban, 1985). A parable of Jesus tells of a man who had sat at the foot of the table at a marriage feast. But the bridegroom honored him by moving him to the head of the table (Luke, chapter 14, verses 8-11). For the Shakers, chairmaking was a form of prayer (Muller & Rieman, 1984). For a Taiwanese woman at a university that I attended, the limited choices of where she could sit conflicted with her sense of proper orientation to space since her religion teaches that one should always sit facing the door, and the door should face east. (Wen-Yen Do, personal communication, 1/10/91). A quote from a United States government publication entitled, *Our Islands and their People*, published in 1899, exemplifies the political nature of sitting. A photo caption reads, "Natives near Manila—These people represent the lower orders and mixed races, their squatting positions, similar to the monkey's favorite attitude, indicate a no-distant-removal from the 'connecting link'" (Black, 1988, p. 16). This suggested that the Filipino people were uncivilized because they did not sit on chairs, implying that the United States was justified in ruling over them, indeed, that the United States had a responsibility to govern these "squatters." The word *squaw* (which sounds like *squat*) was used by Euro-Americans to denote the inferior status of Native American women by the way they sat, which was squatting rather than upon Western style chairs. "Afro-mobiles," popular at the turn of the century in West Palm Beach, were wicker chairs on wheels peddled

around town by an African-American driver. The person (usually a man) in the front leisure chair was considered of higher status than the person peddling from behind (Saunders, 1983, p. 98). In an 1895 Montgomery Ward & Co. catalogue, the titles and descriptions of chairs exemplify how social attitudes shape aesthetic preferences. For example a "very comfortable ladies' rocker . . . just the thing for nursing and sewing" was an unpadded straight back chair without armrests. As a woman that has both nursed and sewn, I would prefer the "strong and comfortable . . . most magnificent men's large arm rocker" (p. 613).

Another example of ideologies expressed through forms and arrangements of chairs and the ways that people sit is the ancient practice, and modern disuse, of women sitting while giving birth. According to Soranus of Ephesus, an obstetrician in Rome during the second century A.D., "Women in a sitting position partook more actively in the delivery, and that she should sit up in the chair when the cervix reached full dilation" (Haukeland, 1981, p. 115). Vases from the ancient Inca empire portray women giving birth in a sitting position. The delivery chair is found in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, ancient Jewish writings, and in engravings and woodblock prints in European medical textbooks until 1861 when Semmelweis insisted that poor hygienic conditions increased when women gave birth in a sitting position. The problem was not that women were less clean in a sitting position but that doctors preferred sedating women so that they could attend to the birth in a position that fit their comfort needs (Haukeland, 1981, p. 115-117). The Greek and Roman idea of women as passive beings increasingly influenced medical practices so that by the 18th century, and until very recently, women were given drugs to subdue their involvement and made to deliver in a recumbent position. With the mother supine, the nurse, midwife, or woman's caretaker during childbirth experienced poor working conditions since they had to lean over the woman for hours. This position hindered communication between assistant and patient. In 1980 Haukeland invented the Kongsberg delivery chair. After trials and refinements in the chair the results were that:

We experienced spontaneous deliveries in the chair in cases which, in the opinion of experienced midwives, would have required operative assistance if the patient had given birth in a recumbent position. In cases that required use of a vacuum extractor, there were no technical problems of access. Patients who had entered the second stage of labor in a recumbent position reported that the intense back pains almost disappeared or were significantly reduced after they moved to the chair. (Haukeland, 1981, p. 117)

The use of delivery chairs will no doubt increase as social conceptions encompass a view of women as active rather than passive.

A Multicultural and Environmental Art Curriculum Model

Through the sponsorship of *Skipping Stones*, a children's multicultural quarterly magazine, and a grant from the Oregon Arts Commission for 1991, Amy Klauke, a poet, and I, a visual artist, created and facilitated a multicultural and environmental art unit. The activities were intended to increase awareness of chairs as cultural expressions, and to provoke the opportunity for a closer realization of the experiences of other human beings. We taught the art unit in diverse settings and varied age groups including: a graduate seminar, and an undergraduate course on visual literacy at the University of Oregon; third and fourth graders in a homogeneous setting of students of Scandinavian heritage in the fishing town of Astoria, Oregon; special needs students, upper elementary and middle school students in Chiloquin, Oregon, which has a high percentage of Native Americans and low per capita income; and upper elementary students in the Dalles in Oregon, which has a substantial population of Mexican-Americans.

The unit emphasized the four variables of space, time, communication, and meaning expressed in chairs and the ways that people sit. The lessons clearly demonstrate relationships between environment and social organization. We believe that the elements of this unit may serve as an art curriculum model for studying the social and political values embedded in material culture. Our focus on chairs was only one example of material culture. Some other foci could include entranceways, containers, or clocks. The objectives were: (a) to experience how it might feel to be in a different cultural context; (b) to examine the social nature of chairs and the cultural issues embedded in the ways people "sit"; (c) to examine the four variables of space, time, communication, and meaning reflected in the organization of the designed environment and the designed objects (particularly chairs) within the natural environment; (d) to create a chair considering space, time, communication, and meaning that expresses aspects of oneself; and (e) to respond to other people's chairs, through creative writing and/or dialogue, emphasizing how or what temporal, spatial, communication, and/or meaning variables are suggested or expressed. The first lesson focused on objective "a," the second lesson focused on objectives "b" and "c" and also provided direction for the last two lessons, which emphasized objectives "d" and "e."

I describe the unit in the following sections as we taught it to upper elementary school children of primarily Scandinavian heritage in Astoria, Oregon. We varied the unit when we taught it in other settings to different age and cultural groups. It serves as an example of the basic strategy and curriculum content of the art unit.

Experientially Deconstructing Material Culture

I asked students as they entered the classroom to choose where they would like to sit. I pointed out options such as a wooden drawing bench, pillows, metal chairs, chairs on top of tables or at the teacher's desk, straw mats, floor tapestries, low

benches, short stools, kneeling chairs, cardboard boxes, or whatever else they deemed suitable. I asked students to reflect upon what they chose, the process that they went through to make this choice, and why they felt best in that place. I also asked them to watch how and what seats others chose. We videotaped the process which allowed us the option to play back in order to generate discussion.

After discussing the wide range of choices that people made, Amy asked the students in Spanish to move to a seat that they would not like. We were surprised at how effectively this technique provoked an experience outside of the students' usual world view. All but the Spanish speaking students were puzzled and uncomfortable. The non-Spanish speaking students knew that the guest teacher was asking them to do something that they felt they were supposed to understand, however they did not know what was expected of them. Amy then described in English how their peers from other countries, when first encountering an English speaking classroom like theirs, would initially feel as they did. We related this experience, through several examples, to the visual cues of the arrangement of objects in spaces, especially sitting spaces, that provide a limited range of choices of how to act. Then we described spaces that might exist in other cultures and asked students what they would do in those spaces. We pointed out, for example, that the board that some chose to sit on might be used as a table in Japanese tea ceremonies and to sit on it would be very inappropriate behavior in that context. In this way students began to understand that what they know and do is culture specific, and that what they are familiar with is not necessarily better than that of others. Perhaps our familiar customs and behaviors may even be contrary to other people's cultural norms.

Amy then repeated her Spanish instructions in English. She asked students to find a place to sit that they would not like, and would avoid if possible. We were amazed at the creativity and purposefulness that students displayed in response to this exercise. Some students turned chairs toward a corner. Others made their noses touch the chalkboard; or sat crowded together under the table or in a variety of either alienated, overcrowded, or awkward positions. Those who preferred to sit unnoticed

moved to highly visible spots and looked extremely uncomfortable. We discussed how one person's preference, such as feeling important sitting upon a high chair on a table corresponded to another's fear of that same position.

In the second lesson we used slides of chairs from different places and ages both to broaden the concept of chairs and of sitting, and to stimulate discussion about meanings derived from such a contextual investigation. In other words, we explored possible messages that were communicated to us, or to those that created the chairs, or used the chairs. From the 41 slides that the students saw, the following descriptions of 17 slides indicate the variety of images that were used to illustrate the variables of space, time, communication, and meaning. Captions describe the image; followed by examples of the information that we gave and questions that we asked to stimulate thought and discussion.

1. This watercolor is designed with several comic strip style boxes showing a man waiting for his girlfriend at a park bench (Takeshita, 1988, p. 18).

Many things can happen, many stories take place around chairs. Have you ever waited in a chair? To the left is Japanese writing. This picture is part of a Japanese story about the many experiences of a park bench. A park caretaker takes care of the bench. Do you think the caretaker likes it when the bench is used? In what ways might he like it to be used? In Japan the word "wabi" describes the beauty of poverty and simplicity or of something used and worn. Is there a chair or object in your home that is used so much it is worn, but it is very special because it is used so much?

2. This color photograph shows 3 views of a chair, that looks like a Mondrian painting. It is designed by Rietveld from the DeStijl group in 1918, and finished with ebony aniline dye, with the seat, back and terminals lacquered red, blue, and yellow (Russell, 1980, p. 109).

This chair looks as if no human hands created it or can affect it. Would the concept of beauty as something used and worn (wabi) match this artist's aesthetic intentions?

3. This is a color photograph of a 2 year old girl from India, sitting with legs and hands spread out, playing in the sand of the beach. Her chair is the whole beach and she is stretching as far as she can to feel her personal space. Each of you has a personal space that you carry around with you wherever you go. Sometimes we are upset when other people, or too many things that are not ours, get into our space. Personal space is different for each of us, and it changes as we change over time or find ourselves in different locations.

4. This is a color photograph of young girl from India swinging on a swing.

Sometimes chairs move. While we swing we are moving through space with the chair responding to our body movements. How do you feel on a swing compared to a classroom chair?

5. This is a color photograph of children sliding down a curved slide.

Sometimes we move while sitting. This is a very long curved chair. Think about the relationship of time to the way that we feel in chairs by comparing rocking slowly or waiting in a chair to sliding down a long chair like this one.

6. This is a color photograph of a 1920s white wicker chaise lounge by a pool (Saunders, 1983, p. 22).

Chairs are always within a particular place in relationship to other things or people. Chairs convey wealth and status. Describe the type of person you would expect to see sitting in this chair? Why? What would you feel like doing in this chair? What would you see while sitting in this chair?

7. This is a watercolor of an African woman weaving a basket on a woven mat (Seed, 1987).

Here's a chair that is a mat. The women probably made the mat out of the same local materials (grasses) that she is using for the basket she is making. What kinds of values are represented by having mass produced chairs rather than handmade chairs? Would she be just as comfortable making her basket in a chair like you normally use in school?

8. This is a watercolor of Arab girls sitting on steps and upside-down buckets (Haskins, 1987).

These Arab girls found a nice place to gather and talk together. Steps and upside-down buckets make convenient chairs. What objects might you find to sit on that were not originally intended as seats? What objects might children in Africa, Alaska, or other places find for seats?

9. This is a watercolor of a man sitting on the grass under a tree feeding birds which are on the bench next to him (Takeshita, 1988, p. 15).

In this case the man is on the ground and the birds are on the bench. Who will you want to sit in the chair that you make? The following quote by a Teton Sioux describes his relationship to the earth by the action of sitting:

The Lakota was a true naturalist—a lover of Nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth, and the attachment grew with age. The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. . . . The soil was soothing, strengthening, cleansing, and healing. This is why the old Indian still sits upon the earth instead of propping himself up and away from its life-giving force. . . . (Chief Standing Bear in Nerburn & Mengleko, 1991, pp. 3-4)

10. This slide is of a black and white photograph of Korean women kneeling on a mat during a tea ceremony (Blofeld, 1985, p. 74).

When you came into the room and saw this low raised board, most of you thought to sit on it as if it was a bench. Some Asian people, and some of you who are not of Asian heritage, might have knelt by it, perceiving it as a table. Tea ceremonies in Korea, Japan, and China require one to kneel on a mat rather than sit on chairs at a table like the British do during their afternoon tea parties. Many Japanese people correlate stillness while sitting to an ability to concentrate. Some say that moving your leg while sitting will shake your spirit out. Can you concentrate better while being still or moving? We understand spaces and decide what to do in those spaces based on our beliefs, and cultural heritage.

11. This is a black and white photograph of Filipino people squatting and talking together (Black, 1988, p. 16).

These Filipino people in 1899 were used to and comfortable in a squatting position. Let's try this position. They sat for hours like this talking or working. A dancer told me that this position was very good for our bodies, in fact, better for us than the position on Western style chairs because our blood circulates in such a way as to conserve our energy. It also aids breathing and stretches the spine. If you are uncomfortable in this position think how someone might feel who was used to this position if they had to sit all day in chairs at school. Perhaps they would feel as uncomfortable as you do now.

12. This is a watercolor of Bedouin, Arab women in their tent home (Haskins, 1987).

The tent for these Bedouins is their home. They are nomads who move according to where they can find grazing land for their herds of sheep and goats. Rugs are their chairs. It would be impractical to carry around Western style chairs. For Bedouins, privacy is obtained by moving to a remote area rather than going into a room and shutting the door. How would you feel in a chair

outside in an open field compared to sitting in the corner of a room?

13. This is a slide of a 1944 letter describing the poor health of Sister Lillian which forecasted the end of Shaker chairmaking (Muller & Rieman, 1984, p. 231).

With the death of Sister Lillian in 1947, more than a century and a half of chairmaking among Shakers ended. The last participant was Sister Sarah, who seated the chairs. Making an object, for Shaker people, was an act of prayer. What story is hidden in your chair?

14. This is a color photograph of a room designed by Stefandis. The chairs are copies by Stefandis of an original French crapund-style chair of 1840. The furniture is covered with fabric (Stefandis, 1988, p. 78).

Chairs are often referred to as having human characteristics like arms, legs, a back, and feet. In the Victorian Era, people referred to legs as limbs so as not to be too suggestive of the human body. They also draped the legs of tables and chairs so as not to arouse any associations with the human body. These tables and chairs look like they are wearing long dresses. Will you add a dress to your chair? Why or why not?

15. This is a black and white photograph of wicker conversation chairs which were manufactured around 1890 in the United States. The chair has dual set-in cane seats, birdcage designs under the arms, curlicues, wooden beadwork, circular scrollwork, and closely woven yet intricately patterned backrests (Saunders, 1983, p. 116).

Some chairs encourage interaction. When we sit in rows, what kind of interaction is encouraged? How are your classroom desks and chairs arranged? Does the arrangement encourage you to talk to each other? If these chairs could talk, what would they say to each other? You might write a story about the conversation between two chairs, or of how two people inter-

acted in these conversational styled chairs. Can you think of names of chairs that either describe their function or their symbolic purpose?

16. This is a watercolor of a sad looking man sitting with his dog on a sidewalk at night (Gutiérrez & Oliver, 1988).

A chair may be nothing but the pavement of a sidewalk. If it wasn't dark, would this man seem as lonely in this picture? How does time and place affect how we feel when sitting? If he were sitting alone inside a house would he seem as lonely?

17. This is a color photograph of two children in a tree.

Branches high up in a tree may serve as chairs. What kind of chair are you going to make? How will the size, materials, shape, function, and style of your chair reflect something about you?

Revealing Culturally Constructed Meanings

In the third lesson, students created a chair using a wide assortment of materials and tools such as: colored scrap paper, tempera paints, paint brushes, hammers, colored plasticine, scissors, hot glue guns, small wood scraps, toothpicks, dried grasses, pine needles, polyfill stuffing, fabric scraps, needles and threads, yarn and trim scraps, garland, tinsel, used small colored tree lights, colored wire scraps, small machine parts, parts to old toys or games, and nails. The chair that they created was their response to the chair activity in the first lesson and from the discussion generated from viewing the slides in lesson two. As they created their chair, they explored questions such as: Will the

chair be for you or someone else; for an individual or a group? What kind of things can you do in the chair? What does the chair do? How do the colors, materials, construction techniques, and finished piece reflect what is important to you? A videotape of the students working on their chairs, along with a display of their finished chairs, generated discussion about the cultural meanings embedded in the materials and processes that they chose.

In the fourth lesson Amy introduced creative writing strategies and discussion questions relating to chairs. Students chose either a chair that someone else had made, or one from the variety of chairs or images of chairs that we had provided. The following are some of the discussion topics and writing strategies that Amy developed.

1. Use metaphor to compare the shape, sound, texture, and color of the chair to something else.

2. Imagine the chair in different places. How do the surroundings affect your chair? Imagine the chair in different time periods. Look at it from different angles. Sit in it in different ways.

3. Give the chair a personality, a tone of voice, and an attitude. Or speak from the chair's perspective. What does the chair know? What kinds of adventures has it had? Write a conversation between two chairs that are from different cultures.

4. Imagine the story of the chair from the cycle of its material from the earth and back to the earth.

5. How would you feel sitting in the chair? How might it affect your body, thoughts, or emotions? How does it affect your relationship to others?

The following are a few examples of students' poems about chairs.

Matt Jacobson (3rd grade)

My chair is a dog's chair.

It has a beach inside.

It's got an unlimited supply

of dog bones.

Steve B. (3rd grade)

My chair has hair. It can float, too. The hair goes down to its toes. He shaves every day. He's big and brown and rough. I like my chair. We like telling ghost stories at night.

Lisa. (3rd grade)

My special chair is made of cotton.

You put it by the pool and

it is pink and it is nine feet

tall. I can see China from there.

A Tiny Chair by Jennifer Young (graduate student)

Out of a fable

a tiny chair

crafted for comfort

designed to biodegrade

Out of a fable

procured from earth

its maple spires

beads cast from clay

and mossy cushions.

An organic fable

of a wood nymph without a table

his tiny chair so inviting

yet ever-vacant.

Further lessons could include field trips to furniture stores and chairmaker and reupholstering shops to provide insight into the diversity and/or common local aesthetics. In our area we have a Scandinavian furniture store and futon and frame builders, as well as the popular discount stores with stackable multiuse furniture. There are many stories such as *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams (1982), and folktales such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (which we call *Goldilocks and the Three Chairs*), and games like *Musical Chairs* that are excellent springboards to use for discussion concerning the social and political issues of power and gender representation conveyed through chairs.

Sharing and Respecting Differences

We concluded the unit on the social and political nature of chairs with an evening community event where the students exhibited their chairs and read their poems and stories. As the student read his or her poem about another's chair, the student who made it held it up for viewing. We then had the chairmakers describe why they chose the materials that they did, how they made the chair, and what their intentions were for the chair. We videorecorded the students reading their work if they could not attend the evening event. The videotape was shown at the community event.

Summary

Nonverbal communication research on human perception of environmental choices within specific contexts (such as those situations that involve sitting) may provide some clues to why we choose to learn certain things. Understanding diverse world views, as reflected in the environmental choices (such as the type and arrangement of chairs), may also even help us to appreciate cultural diversity. An examination of the choices people make from something as simple as a chair can tell us much about the culture of the people concerned (Rapoport, 1980, p. 15).

This art unit, as an exploration of the ideologies embedded in chairs, was designed to evoke an appreciation of diverse cultures, by presenting people within their own cultural contexts. We attempted to counter rather than reinforce dominant stereotypes. Concerning the Arab world, for example, we included an image (that of men kneeling in prayer) but also included one of Arab girls seated informally for a friendly gathering outdoors. We also depicted the indoor world of Arab women. We wanted to counter the lack of information and imagery given to Arabian females in U.S. media. We did not seek to deny cultural realities of the Arab world: men who participate publicly in religion, women who remain indoors, and young

girls who enjoy freedom denied to their elder sisters and mothers in traditional Islamic societies. Rather we sought, like the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz (1957/1991), to explore these aspects of Arab society by making them visible. Like the novels of Mahfouz, who revealed the life of the secluded Amina—its amenities as well as its limitations—the slide of the Bedouin women reveals their seclusion.

Our goal is to prevent students from feeling that they must become alienated from their cultural and/or social identity to do well in school and/or society. We hope that they may even become empowered to educate their teachers about their relationship to space and time and how that shapes their meanings and means of communication. We hope that they will better understand their own culture and those of others. We agree with Ferdman (1990) that "if individuals can acquire the tools to better define their cultural identity—by, for example, comparing it with a range of possibilities—then learning about a range of cultural products can be enriching" (p. 200). We have explored chairs and the ways people sit. This unit serves as a curriculum model for exploring the social and political meanings that are communicated through the variables of space and time in cultural products such as homes, windows, shoes, eating paraphernalia and rituals, containers, and so on. Exploring the four variables—space, time, communication, and meaning—of the environment helps us to understand others', as well as our own, beliefs, behaviors, and values.

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Endnote

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