A CASE STUDY OF A SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE LESSON IN THE ART CLASSROOM

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by

Emmett Ryan Alastair Drugan

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Thesis written by
Emmett Ryan Alastair Drugan
B.A., Kent State University, 2002
M.A., Kent State University, 2014

Approved by

Linda Hoeptner Poling, Ph.D., Advisor

Christine Havice, Ph.D., Director, School of Art

John R. Crawford, Ed.D., Dean, College of the Arts
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Topic of Study

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes the “practice of freedom”—which means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world. (Freire, 1979, p. 73)

Socially transformative art education advocates explain that art relates to societal issues and teachers should use art to help students understand the issues that affect their lives. In this way, art can be a tool for social change (Garber, 2004; Greene, 1995; Quinn, 2007). Studies have shown that students need to feel safe in their schools in order to succeed; however, many students still face verbal and physical abuse for being different (Blackburn, 2007; Nieto, 2004; Reis, 2008). Some say that children can understand serious issues such as gender bias, differing cultures, sexuality, and other timely issues that affect them (Lester, 2007) and others believe that children should be granted the opportunity to enact social change in their own lives (Blackburn, 2007; Fehr, 1993; Quinn, 2007). One way to do this is by raising awareness, addressing issues, and empowering students to shape their own futures (Blackburn, 2007; Fehr, 1993; Garber, 2004; Lampela, 1996). Unfortunately, many teachers are afraid of discussing socially controversial issues with their students because they may risk public outrage, physical harm, disciplinary action, or even termination of their teaching contract. Teachers also need to educate themselves so that they can properly address these issues (Darden, 2009; Nieto, 2004). By educating the self and others
and addressing issues instead of avoiding them, teachers can begin to ensure the safety of all students (Meyer & Stader, 2009), while also promoting participatory citizenship and democracy for all (Giroux, 2003). My research study aims to reveal a visual art class in a successful socially transformative lesson and provide information to educate and guide other teachers through this process.

Socially transformative art teaching and curriculum is not embraced by all practitioners, whether due to concerns of viability or through lack of understanding. This study addresses these concerns and lack of understanding and makes suggestions for successful implementation of socially transformative art teaching and curriculum. My primary research question is:

- What does a socially transformative art lesson look like?

My secondary research question is:

- In a successfully executed case of a socially transformative art lesson, what are some strategies and advice that can be suggested to help other teachers?

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used operationally in this study:

- Socially Transformative Curriculum- educational practices that raise learners’ critical consciousness of the culture and society around them. The terms socially transformative curriculum, social justice curriculum, social issues curriculum, and social reconstructivism are used interchangeably in this study. While socially transformative curriculum quite often includes controversial issues as topic for discussions, it does not require it. Some issues may also seem more controversial than others depending on community and personal beliefs.
• Visual Culture, as defined by Anderson and Milbrandt (2005, p. 238) - “visual artifacts and performances of all kinds, as well as new and emerging technologies, inside and outside the art museum, and the beliefs, values, and attitudes imbued in those artifacts and performances by the people who make, present, and use them.”

Rationale

There has been a great deal of research published regarding social justice in education, and likewise, there have been some notable works written about socially transformative art education. Art educators Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt wrote *Art for Life: Authentic Instruction in Art* (2005), a book that presents information and lessons on what they call “authentic instruction” that focuses on real life issues relevant to students’ lives. Likewise, *Art Education for Social Justice* (Anderson, Gussak, Hallmark, & Paul, 2010) is written by a range of art educators and includes both social justice theory and lessons for art classes. Most recently, Kevin Tavin and Christine Ballangee-Morris edited a book titled *Stand(ing) Up, for a Change: Voices of Art Educators* (2013) that includes the voices of art educators from a variety of perspectives each making the case for the importance of social justice in art education in one form or another. Other prominent authors that have written on the topic of socially transformative art education include but are not limited to: Elizabeth Garber (2004), Arthur Efland (2004; 2005), and Terry Barrett (2003). It is my intention that this research provides information to art teachers interested in including socially transformative methods in their art classroom. Hopefully, this research inspires art teachers to step outside often restraining or outdated approaches of teaching art to meaningfully include socially transformative art lessons to help empower their students to create positive social change.
Socially transformative education has the potential to transform a classroom into a participatory democracy with the opportunity for social action. This can motivate and empower students by giving them a voice regarding their needs and interests. Teachers become supportive guides; without forcing culture or social values, students begin to understand one another and gain experience learning about others’ differences, weaknesses, and strengths which is a transferrable skill to outside the classroom (Shultz, 2008).

Students will inevitably bring up varying types of social issues at some point whether through their behavior or in situations at home or school, or especially while studying current events, culture, or artists in visual art class. Therefore, it is essential to study these topics and provide information for the education of the teacher and the good of student learning. Art class is a structured environment where students can learn to analyze their values and real-world problems (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Students need to be exposed to these issues in a structured setting to sort all of this information they are bombarded with and learn how to deal with it constructively in the real world.

Rutter and Leach (2006) state that adults need to serve as role models and mentors to help guide and support students through life. Students want this guidance and support as found when educator and author Cheri Huber (2000) conducted an interview with a group of teens and asked them what information the teens wanted adults to know when conversing with them. The teens explained that they need adults to engage in active listening without being judgmental. They wanted adults to get to know them as individuals and to acknowledge their interests and things that are important to them regardless of agreement. The teens wanted respect and were willing to give respect in return. They wanted adults to give them information and facts about issues and trust them in making decisions based on facts. However, equally as important, they explained,
was the willingness for adults to be patient and explain and teach them concepts. They acknowledged they are not “all-knowing” and do not have the same life experience adults have but stated that they were willing to listen if adults were willing to guide them—not just treat them as recipients of orders and premade decisions.

Related, educator, activist, and writer Paul Kivel (2000) explains that students want to learn how to make change with the help of adults:

Students want to make a difference in their lives, they want to affect and change things that affect them. Adults decide all of this for them, make promises, but also fail them. All of this does affect their self-esteem, self-doubt, mistrust, self-destructive behaviors. They are not the problem; they need guidance-modeling. (p.124)

Art aids dialogue on how we see the world and how we see ourselves (Adams, 2002; Garber, 2004). Scruggs (2009) explains that students are more likely to become productive members of society if they have a strong sense of self to accompany their school subject achievements. As bridges are built between school and life outside of school, students no longer just passively live in the area, but can become active citizens.

These readings were valuable as the research seems to dictate that there are issues, including controversial issues that need to be addressed and that teachers need and want to be educated to feel comfortable to begin this dialogue. My thesis research aims to discover and provide the tools to aid teachers in addressing a variety of issues.

This chapter has briefly introduced my topic of study along with the definition of key terms, summary of research in the field as well as rationale for the importance of this research. The subsequent chapter will provide an in-depth review of literature in regards to this study.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

According to Martusewicz and Reynolds (1994), educational curriculum and policy was historically decided by individuals in positions of power. Tradition has continued to present day where sometimes “experts,” not teachers develop curriculum and write textbooks. Many non-educators seem to believe that excellent test scores develop effective leaders. The demand for skills mastery and standardization cause these “experts” to create scripted lessons for teachers to follow instead of encouraging critical awareness (Delacruz, 2009; Fehr, 1994). Martusewicz and Reynolds (1994) explain that to be critical is to be actively engaged in creating freedom. The African American Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968), Women’s Suffrage Movement (1848-1920), and the Stonewall Riots (1969) among other events have taught us that freedom is not guaranteed and we must be willing to reflect upon and change our thoughts and actions when necessary. In order to achieve this, educators need to teach about values, humanity, and debates in their curriculum.

Giroux (2003) and Garber (2004) explain that schools and even museums are reflective of the society around them. Education is a part of politics, power, and authority. Giroux (2003) reminds the reader of Freire’s *Theory and Resistance in Education*, which states that schools can and need to teach students to think critically, to take risks, learn to govern, resist oppression, and take an active role in society. In connection, Garber (2004) defines social justice education as an envisioning of the world as more livable and blissful, with a balance between all living beings and the environment in which they live. In this light, schools need to demonstrate how issues can be used in learning and make connections between school and daily lives. Students can
reflect and act upon the world through critical inquiry strategies. If students learn to think critically, they are in a good position to promote social change. Teachers must first understand and educate themselves and be a willing participant to work for social justice in order to engage students through critical inquiry.

Impact of Socially Transformative Education

Some students and teachers accept that the life they live in and experience cannot be changed. However, if teachers empower themselves to change their approaches to teaching, students may see that they have the power to change the situations around them. Education can help change students’ perceptions of their own circumstances (Grinberg, 1994). Teachers and administrators can choose to support the status quo or help create change.

Grinberg (1994) explains that many students and families have negative outlooks on the world, with good reason. Cultural alienation, low income, low self-esteem, and bureaucratic dependency negatively impact how people view their local community, government, and the rest of society. However, if teachers venture outside of their traditional lessons and lead student reflections and inquiry and discussion on social issues and class life, students may begin to develop a new perception of the world. Children may learn respect, equity, values, and understanding and apply these to themselves, their class, their school and eventually spreading out to the world around them. However, in order for this to happen, Grinberg states that we need a change in education and teachers need to learn how to apply these issues to their lessons.

Teaching students how to think critically about the issues that affect them is important so that they understand that society is changeable and they have the power to transform it (Grinberg, 1994; Wyrick, 2002). Children are aware of issues in society at a young age and awareness is significant when it comes to confronting issues and changing them. If students are
taught the tools to make their school community more democratic and safer, they can take what they have learned beyond the school walls and into the “real world,” and implement them into daily life (Grinberg, 1994).

A Need for Change

Researchers in the field of art education have identified the need for socially transformative curriculum in the art classrooms. Articles and books have been published citing examples from a variety of topics that have been used in art classrooms to raise learners’ critical consciousness of their culture and communities. In particular, such notable examples include: *Stand(ing) Up for a Change: Voices of Arts Educators* (Tavin & Balangee Morris, 2013), *Art Education for Social Justice* (Anderson, Gussak, Hallmark & Paul, 2010), and *Art for Life: Authentic Instruction in Art* (Anderson & Mildbrandt, 2005). These publications include a range of topics such as diversity, culture and values, gender, race, environmental consciousness, consumerism, child labor, fallen heroes, political protest, self-identity, hunger, homelessness, courage, death, and war. These topics might be seen as more relevant and/or controversial to some learners than others depending on their experiences, previous knowledge, and values. The following are highlights and distinctions of each publication.

Through the voices of arts educators, *Stand(ing) Up, for a Change* (2013) explores teaching experiences in classrooms using arts-based activism to stand up for justice and challenge social issues such as racism, culture, courage, hunger, homelessness, death, and war. Teachers from many different communities in the United States and abroad with a variety of different learners contributed to reflections of experiences in social justice art education and have both succeeded and failed. The various chapters provided the idea that art can be a vehicle for social change and can bring critical awareness to the self and community. It also emphasizes that
one should focus positively on strengths to overcome social issues and although art class cannot address every problem, it can become an important part of the struggle. This book made the topic of social justice in art education personable and relatable to art teachers and is motivational and inspiring to those teachers who wish to include such topics in their curriculum.

Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) offer educational theory, practical teaching strategies, and curriculum to teachers interested in what they call “authentic” instruction. The curriculum provided includes images from visual culture and is meaningful and relevant to a diverse range of learners. The authors explain that a critical examination of artwork helps us learn about the world around us in a deeper way and in effect, helps us examine our own beliefs and values. Topics that are addressed in this book include: peace, identity, historical narratives, ecological consciousness, social consciousness in regards to homelessness, and culture and values. This book serves as a guide for art educators wishing to take a holistic approach to curriculum in such a way that speaks to issues important to their students.

*Art Education for Social Justice* (2010) was written for a broad audience including community art educators, K-12 arts educators, and higher education practitioners and offers theory, curriculum, resources, and strategies for those wishing to include social justice topics in their lessons. Narratives include the trials and tribulations of their lessons as well as their successes. The book emphasized the need to connect with students’ needs, experiences, and culture to create meaningful, relevant lessons they will benefit from. The K-12 section focuses on topics such as fallen heroes portraits, environmental awareness mosaics, consumerism and culture photography, and child labor, conflict, and political protest using text and images. There is a wide breadth of knowledge presented practically and authentically on socially transformative issues in the art classroom and other art learning contexts.
Fear

Discussing an array of current, relevant social issues can be a daunting idea for teachers, for these discussions promote change in society and sometimes change can be uncomfortable and scary to people, which can be wrought with conflict and contention. It is possible that if teachers are not sure how to engage in these types of discussions, they may not try approaching them at all. Perhaps it is not so much the unwillingness to change that has teachers repeating the “safe,” or controversy-free lessons, but the insecurity and low confidence of the teacher due to lack of knowledge on the subjects—ultimately due to fear. The inability to plan for each interaction with students about social issues can be intimidating to teachers that are used to teaching concrete factual subject matter (Biegel, 2010).

Many times, teachers are afraid to address controversial issues because they were taught that it is not polite to talk about race or social status for example, and avoiding the issue can be viewed as the new racism. If society pretends the issues do not exist, it perpetuates the problems, and progress towards positive change cannot be made (Darden, 2009; Scruggs, 2009).

Related to this state of fear, there is a genuine cause for concern specifically for teachers addressing heteronormativity in their classrooms as there are people in society such as teachers, educators, parents, and the like, that perceive homosexuality as a negative trait (Lampela, 1995) and feel that homosexual books, art, or subject matter risk public outrage—as they address “adult issues” and feel that books might recruit people to homosexuality (Lester, 2007). As a result, there are seven states that currently have laws prohibiting positive portrayals of homosexuality, including Arizona, Texas, and Alabama, South Carolina, Louisiana, Utah, and Mississippi. Fear is certainly at the root cause of such state of affairs. These schools and supporters claim that they are only concerned about pedophilia and promotion of immoral and/or detrimental lifestyles.
Unsurprisingly, in these states, students are harassed at a higher frequency, making the case for addressing fear of dealing with social issues in education (Meyer & Stader, 2009).

Starting dialogue in a social issues curriculum can be perceived by some as challenging because teachers can be retaliated against or fired for not upholding the status quo (Garber, 2004; Kumashiro, 2004), so teachers hesitate speaking out for fear of losing jobs or other undesirable action (Darden, 2009; Garber, 2004; Lampela, 1996; Quinn, 2007; Shultz, 2008; Wyrick, 2002). Other obstacles that may prevent teachers from using socially transformative curriculum may include but are not limited to: large classes, limited class time, teacher burnout, and standardized testing (Biegel, 2010). While these are very real hindrances and need to be taken into consideration, suggestions for implementation in the art classroom will be addressed later on in this chapter.

Implementing Socially Transformative Education in Schools

According to Dewey (as cited in Eisner, 1973), schools should be social centers where groups of children explore themes with interests and their community in mind and how they relate to society; learning should be meaningful. Social reconstruction can be a focus in schools (Stankiewicz, 2001) which is shown through the Teaching Tolerance Project (1997) that describes the difficulties and successes of teaching tolerance in seven different elementary classrooms. Though there were differences in some teaching strategies there were many similarities between the schools. Stankiewicz asserts that social skills are taught, demonstrated, and enforced to get students ready for the future. A student’s world is now global; they must learn tolerance, as there is no alternative that is acceptable. Healthy peer relationships are encouraged as children as young as six months are influenced by peers. Self-acceptance is promoted as acceptance of others then follows. Bridging activities with the community is
important, as it helps develop empathy towards others, further enhancing their tolerance of others. Stankiewicz noted that teachers felt it was important to bring different groups together so that there was a sense of belonging, understanding, and empathy.

Also related, Nieto (2004) states that teachers identified as effective with students of diverse cultural backgrounds in urban schools possess important characteristics. First, they place a high value on students and their identities. They make connections to their students’ lives and hold high expectations and commit to their learning. They also provide a safe haven for learning and care, respect, and show love for their students. These effective teachers see parents and community members as partners and work together. They challenge the bureaucracy of school and district when necessary and are resilient in difficult situations. The effective educators show solidarity and love for students and develop meaningful relationships. These teachers are lifelong learners, are flexible, willing to experiment and implement active learning strategies in their curriculum. These characteristics could certainly be construed as favorable for any effective teacher.

Importance of Socially Transformative Curriculum in Art Education

The world lives and breathes and is constantly changing. Curricula in many schools have maintained stale, outdated methods; unresponsive to change. This can be true even in the world of art education (Efland, 2004). One might ask, “Why art? What does socially transformative education have to do with art education?” Simply put, art communicates thoughts, feelings, ideas, culture, and history (Freeland, 2001). Communication is key to stimulate change. Avoiding discussions of topics that affect students’ lives can cause “ignorance and conflict” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004, p. 129). Before change can happen, art teachers need to recognize social issues that occur both inside and outside the educational environment.
According to bell hooks (1994), teachers need to look at their teaching styles and consider changing it. hooks explains that in her experience many professors saw a need for including socially transformative curricula and attempted to discuss diversity in the classroom. However, some professors lacked strategies to deal with opposition in the classroom and were deficient in the skills to facilitate dialogue and as a result, they started to doubt these new lessons and quickly reverted back to previous curricula. They were also afraid of relinquishing power to their students, but teachers need to keep in mind that in the classroom we all have power in different ways, but what is most important is respect for one another and an equal dedication to education (hooks, 1994). What might help in a situation such as this, would be attending workshops, receiving guidance, and/or preparing and researching the curricula before attempting to apply it to the classroom.

Teachers must institute dialogue in the classrooms to address issues so students start to think for themselves. Education that creates critical consciousness can change their thinking (hooks, 1995). Teachers need to challenge stereotypes and take advantage of teachable moments. Instructors should create an aesthetic culture in the art classroom that supports diversity and use recognized artists from all backgrounds to develop students’ knowledge and interactions (hooks, 1995). Furthermore, students require guidance to create context and connection to these artworks and artists.

Art curriculum should include themes, social issues, and/or cultural topics. According to Fehr (1994), it is important to teach children economic, sociological, political, and educational agendas that drive art. It should be brought to students’ attention that art is not just for rich collectors or for aesthetic value but can be for guiding creativity to tangible social tasks to moral shaping of culture (Garber, 2004). In other words, art making can be used to change lives
instead of just being displayed in the art world. Art education can teach others how to be socially active, confront historical, social, economic, political issues, and encourages engagement in real life issues. This relates to community and social needs—verbally and also changes in attitudes. Teaching these topics helps students know themselves and the world around them as active citizens. One way to relate to students’ lives and teach students about the society they live in is by using visual culture in the art curriculum.

Importance of Visual Culture in the Socially Transformative Art Curriculum

Images and objects present opinions as if they were truth, reinforce attitudes, and confirm or deny beliefs and values. If the messages carried by visual culture are not interpreted, we will be unwittingly buying, wearing, promoting, and otherwise consuming opinions with which we may or may not agree. (Barrett, 2003, p. 12)

Visual culture specifically can be a valuable tool in a socially transformative art educator’s curriculum. Deconstructing images from visual culture in the art classroom forces students to reflect consciously on their lives and gives them the opportunity to think critically about issues such as gender, race, and heteronormativity (Staikidis, 2013). Its purpose, Efland (2005) states, is “to teach students to become critically attentive to the cultural meanings that visual images convey for the purpose of understanding society and culture, including how these images help create the shared meanings we call culture” (p. 36). Images and media from popular visual culture are relevant and relatable to students’ lives. Television, computers, advertisements and other visual media play a large role in our everyday lives. These images can be positive as well as rife with racism, sexism, intolerance, and the like (Smith-Shank, 2004). Since the onslaught of visuals is becoming increasingly embedded in our culture, it is necessary to be able to read, interpret, and act on visuals, rather than passively viewing them (Albers, 1999; Anderson
& Milbrandt, 2005). Therefore, it is advantageous to deconstruct images of popular visual culture and critically analyze them (Barrett, 2003). Uncovering deeper meaning by critically analyzing and discussing popular media can help students discover themselves and their own beliefs. Critical inquiry uncovers layers of meaning hidden in images and can give students a sense of empowerment and involvement in society (Garber, 2004), thus contributing to a socially transformative curriculum.

Even seemingly innocent well-known children’s movies from Disney© provide material for discussions on race, gender, and sexuality (Anderson & Tavin, 2003). In such an instance, Anderson and Tavin showed Disney© movie clips to fifth grade art students to begin conversations about these issues. Their goals were “to develop a critical thinking of popular visual culture and produce meaningful artworks based on issues in everyday life” (Anderson & Tavin, 2003, p. 33). They began the lesson by defining the terms “issues” and “stereotypes” and relating them to observations and personal experiences. Then, students looked at Disney© video clips, analyzed what they saw and discussed issues they interpreted in the clips. Using this information, students created artworks that addressed the issues in a positive way. Through the use of visual culture, the authors created a successful socially transformative art lesson that was relatable and relevant to their students.

Through the use of visual culture to open up dialogue concerning relevant issues in students’ lives, students begin to self-reflect on their identity and the world around them. They develop deeper understanding about society and can, in turn, reflect this visually in their art work.
In Conclusion

In a successful socially transformative art class, teachers encourage students to talk openly about relevant social issues prompted by images from visual culture. Through these discussions, students learn about others in society as well as themselves. By discussing these issues in an honest way as opposed to avoiding subjects that are brought up, students are taught about respect, values, fairness, and problem solving.

A child’s prejudice forms over time, and the child doesn’t necessarily understand it, but it is reinforced through peers and experience in good or bad ways. This devaluing of others hurts all people involved and hinders growth and healthy self-concepts. Socially transformative art teachers acknowledge and discuss differences through visual culture in the classroom. In this way, teachers can improve student self-concept and cause a rippling effect outwards, helping them to accept others.

I have had the experience of implementing many of these approaches in my classroom and it did positively shape my classroom environment. I have included some of my successful socially transformative lessons in Appendix A. In these lessons, students were encouraged to speak their minds and question, not blindly follow. By doing this, students actively engaged in dialogue during assignments, discussions, and critiques. Students were guided through steps to solve problems that arose and some problems were brought to the entire class to find solutions. Art curriculum was beyond face value and connected with students’ daily lives and concerns for their community and even global issues. Students were engaged and this reflected in easy classroom management. These approaches have worked for schools mentioned in Teaching Tolerance (1997) and for me in my art classroom, but I question what other successful art education programs look like when implementing socially transformative methods.
This chapter provided a review of literature concerning the need for socially transformative education, fears regarding socially transformative education, implementation of socially transformative education in schools, addressing fears of socially transformative education in the art class, implementation of socially transformative education in the art classroom, and importance of visual culture in connection to socially transformative art curriculum. The following chapter will explain the methods and methodologies I used in the research design, as well as collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter summarizes the methods of research taken in order to answer the question: 1.) What does a socially transformative lesson used in an art classroom look like? First, the research paradigm and research design are stated. Then the data sources of the participant and site are introduced. Data collection, interview questions, and data analysis are then described. Finally, categories of research bias and indicators of rigor are expressed to close out this chapter.

Research Paradigm

Qualitative research can be described as investigations in the quality of an activity or topic. Some characteristics might include: researching in a setting that is unaffected and ordinary, describing what is happening as it happens, and sorting out and organizing this information to make sense to others (Stockrocki, 1997). Qualitative research can include narratives, case studies, interviews, observations, and ethnographies (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Stockrocki, 1997). Qualitative methodology reflects the approach taken in this research. Qualitative study differs from quantitative study which tends to depend on procedures, statistics, manipulation, and even experiments. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explain that it is the best approach when investigating cause-and-effect relationships and testing hypotheses. According to Stake (1995), the goal of qualitative research is to present researched information to educate others and expand the field.

Research Design

For my research on socially transformative art education, I chose to use the qualitative research approach. I conducted a case study using interview and observation methods. I feel that
this was appropriate because I was searching for a successful socially transformative art curriculum and wished to observe and study this topic. I did not intend to manipulate any information, experiment, or come up with statistics. Instead I observed, describing ordinary and unaffected situations as they unfolded. My hope is that by reporting this information, it may help other teachers utilize not only socially transformative methods, but strategies that create favorable conditions in which socially transformative art teaching can thrive.

Specifically, I took on the role of interviewer and participant observer. As an interviewer, I gathered information such as background context, reflection, experience, opinions, and explanations, through dialogue with the interviewee. While a participant observer, I participated by observing the setting and described what I saw, documented what interactions took place and what situations occurred, and asked for clarification when needed.

Data Sources

**Introduction to the Site**

The participant’s school, “High School X,” where she teaches is a grade 9-12 high school that lies in a suburb in Northeast Ohio. The majority (97%) of the students are Caucasian and the school is about equal in terms of gender. At the time of the data collection, there were 15 African Americans and two students from South America. The school and surrounding community share a conservative reputation. The socio-economic statuses of students range from…but primarily fell in the mid- to low-middle class range. The participant’s art classroom was in contrast a space in which these labels and reputations could be explored and questioned, defined by a reputation of self-exploration and into one’s identity. Diversity and openness to ideas defined the classroom space. At the time of data retrieval, 1580 students were enrolled in High School X. 29% of High School X’s students qualify for free or reduced lunches. According to the 2010 United States
National Census, the population in High School X’s community is around 49,652 and the median household income in this community is around $47,500. In terms of relevant occupation group percentages, approximately 8% reported being blue collar workers, 19% reported being a professional worker, 16% reported being in the sales force, and 44% were unknown.

The Participant

The participant for whom I will use the pseudonym, “Abby,” is a Caucasian woman in her early 30’s with seven years of experience at High School X. In addition to other discipline degrees within Humanities and Sciences, she earned a post baccalaureate degree in Art Education, a BFA in Art and a Master’s degree in Art Education. She considers herself a socially transformative art educator and uses socially transformative lessons between 75 and 85 percent of the time, blending in formal art lessons to create her curriculum. Abby teaches traditional media immersion and skill building to enhance the ability of students to communicate their ideas and beliefs; she blends formal with socially transformative lessons but asserts the heart of her curriculum resides in raising students’ critical consciousness about the issues of their lives.

Data Collection

Three 45-minute interviews were conducted and audio recorded. These interviews were later transcribed (exhibited in Appendix B) and shown to the participant for accuracy. Following Seidman’s (1998) suggestions, nearly every question asked was an open-ended question so that it was more of a participant-driven interview where there was more opportunity for information to be more thoroughly explained. The participant signed an audio recording and participant consent form. She was also encouraged to read and comment upon the accuracy of the interview transcripts.
During the interviews I took notes to document my thoughts during the participant’s responses. Participant interviews took place in Abby’s classroom during planning periods and were held in a semi-structured manner for clarity and follow up questioning. A pseudonym was used for the school and participant to protect her anonymity. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight and first hand experiences from a known art teacher who uses socially transformative teaching methods.

**Initial Interview Questions**

1. Could you please describe your school setting and demographics?
2. What issues are relevant to your students?
3. Would you consider your school a safe environment for students? Why?
4. Could you tell me about your classroom environment?
5. Could you please describe your art education program?
6. Where did you receive your education on Socially Transformative Curriculum?
7. When did you start including Socially Transformative Curriculum?
8. Why did you start including Socially Transformative Curriculum?
9. What kind of Socially Transformative lessons do you teach?
10. Did you have any obstacles incorporating Socially Transformative lessons in the art classroom? From students? From teachers? From administration? From the community?
11. Has your curriculum had to change since you started using lessons for social change? If so, Why?
12. Has anyone lauded your approach to your art curriculum?
13. Do you receive any support in your curriculum?
14. What type of advice would you give to someone that wants to try this approach?
Interviews and separate observations of the focus class were conducted for nine days over a four week period (dates and times were noted), allowing ample time to collect data and to observe over a variety of days. The average time of a typical observation was a class period the duration of the lesson, from start to finish, about one hour.

Because research took place with a single art educator and for only one lesson, I took into consideration that there were limitations posed in the research design. Any number of environmental and social factors along with personal bias and emotions may affect the participant, possibly ensuing a slightly skewed analysis. The participant was informed of the focus of my investigation before the start of the research to make visible my intentions.

Research Questions

Research questions were divided into two sections: primary and secondary. My primary research question is: How is a socially transformative lesson executed in the art classroom setting? I feel that this research question is feasible as I feel that the question is fairly clear and open-ended and more interviewee led to allow for more natural dialogue as Seidman (1998) suggests.

Data Analysis

Data was collected via verbal interview with audio recording that was subsequently transcribed, observation, field notes, and personal reflection. Data analysis transpired by breaking the information down into perceivable patterns with the aid of a university professor experienced in research. Patterns were coded and synthesized, and relationships within the data were identified as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003). Categories were created to construct meaningful, workable data that could be easily identified. Patterns were also identified when overlapping themes were seen together in the interviews, observations, and field notes.
Bias

Research bias occurs when a researcher lets one’s personal feelings, opinions, or attitudes get in the way of the research at hand and sway the findings one way or another. As a researcher, while admittedly hoping this case study would prove to reveal a positive example of socially transformative curriculum in action, I consciously worked to maintain an academic distance from the research, and forced myself to be objective, yet enthusiastic.

Indicators of Rigor

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), rigor is the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data and the process of research during a case study. These criteria are imperative to establish an echelon of confidence and expectation within a qualitative study.

Credibility

Ethical principles were ensured by using pseudonyms for those being researched as well as the setting. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed exactly, bringing conversation authenticity to the audience. The participant was able to review, modify, and expand on any answers given during the interviews. All recording materials were locked up during research and were promptly destroyed afterwards. The participant was treated fairly, was able to leave at any time, remain silent at any time, and filled out a consent form informing the participant of her rights. In addition, there was no deception of the participant at any time.

Transferability

Transferability of this qualitative research is for others to transfer the data collected in this case study to help educate others who may be less informed and to illuminate similar circumstances in similar settings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the transferability of
this research creates an opportunity for others to understand or further explore this study to build on and surpass the content of this information. Appendix B, of this thesis includes interview transcripts to encourage further study of this subject beyond what is contained here.

*Dependability and Confirmability*

This case study’s dependability was authenticated by the method in which data was collected. Interviews were conducted with a participant who was involved with the subject related to the investigation. Questions were conducted in a semi-structured, sequential approach to collect the information in a logical way for data analysis and interpretation. Interviews were member checked by the interviewee, Abby, for accuracy and a confirmability audit of the data was also constructed by a university professor to assure rigor. This individual is an art education professor with several years of teaching, theory, and research experience, including qualitative research methods in art education. This source is a knowledgeable, experienced professional who was asked to confirm or contest the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

*Summary*

This case study and its methods were conducted to seek out information about socially transformative teaching methods in the art classroom and analyze the data and present the findings in such a way so as to help other teachers. The observations and interviews were designed to capture the participant’s pedagogy as well as her personality, point of view, and atmosphere of the participant and site. This information presented will help other art teachers who wish to understand socially transformative curriculum and teaching and who also want to know how to apply it to their classroom. The following chapter will examine the data retrieved from the participant and observations in-depth to further describe these elements.
INTRODUCTION

For this case study, I conducted three 45-minute interviews and observed instruction and classroom activities for nine days in four weeks. My interviews provided the glimpses into the layers of Abby’s personality and point of view while my observations revealed facets of her teaching methods and approaches, interactions with students, and overall classroom atmosphere. From the interview and observation data, categories and patterns emerged and were analyzed and interpreted. I divided them into two main sections: Socially Transformative Curriculum and Portrait of a Socially Transformative Art Educator. The former describes the curricular content, exposes common threads and praxis, explains the importance of socially transformative curriculum, and also richly describes the Socially Transformative Visual Culture Project. The latter describes the teaching characteristics that have aided and promoted a successful socially transformative curriculum. Following is a summary, explanation and interpretation of each of these categories.

Socially Transformative Curriculum

Description

Choosing current and relatable visual artwork and media from visual culture is essential to creating a successful socially transformative art education curriculum. Although studying art in an historical sense is important and can help students understand the past and some of the present, students can not truly understand the present unless they investigate current and contemporary art and theory. Studying and exploring current, contemporary, and relatable art helps students engage in their world, a world that we know they are trying to discover and figure
out (Gude, 2009). When teachers choose to show and discuss relatable artworks they validate student experiences and help develop students’ knowledge and experience (Garber, 2004). By deconstructing what they see and know, and then personally reconstructing it, students have an improved sense of their own reality—the world that affects them and one that they can change (Gude, 2009).

Educators may wonder how one chooses content that is current and relatable. According to Kevin K. Kumashiro in, *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice*, there is no ‘best’ approach, but it is important to know our students’ interests, knowledge, and limits of their own knowledge (2004). Teachers need to derive their curriculum from students’ experiences and issues in order to engage in dialogue (Friere, 1998). Shore (1992) also echoes this, calling teachers that use subjects from student culture and materials from daily life as a starting point “critical interdisciplinary teachers” (p.186). Abby’s use of current and relatable artworks in her socially transformative curriculum is described below.

*Description and Content of Socially Transformative Art Curriculum*

An example of socially transformative learning that involved contemporary art and popular culture was a music video by popular hip hop artist Jay-Z, namely *On To the Next One* (2009) which integrated the art of Damien Hirst, a contemporary artist. She chose this music video not only because it included relevant art the class could discuss, but it was also relatively recent and relatable, as many of the students were familiar with the video. While students would have enjoyed singing along with the video, as they began to as soon as the video started, Abby muted the music so that they could focus on the images and led a discussion that helped the students deconstruct the video and revealed the meanings of the images they saw. The class covered topics from the video such as mass consumerism, excess, fame, and celebrity. Students
noted that they enjoyed the video but never knew how meaningful it was and now enjoyed watching it even more and developed a new respect for the media. This reveals the importance of moving students from level of “fan” where one copies, is inspired by, or pays homage to a popular cultural phenomena to that of a critical visual consumer (Manifold, 2013).

Abby also discussed the Modern Art Movement concerning design and related Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943) to recent Hollywood movie, *The Butterfly Effect* (2004) by saying, “If a person was to rearrange one thing it affects the entire environment.” I have a feeling that was one of the best correlations for students to understand design as it was something most had already watched and were able to make solid connections. Abby discussed the Dada movement and compared it to 1999 Hollywood movie, *The Matrix*. She then played German Dada artist Hugo Ball’s *Karawane* (1916) which is phonetic poetry. She explained to students she was, “empowering them as consumers to go beyond surface reality and to venture further to see what’s really going on.” She showed very diverse, interesting, thought-provoking images to get students thinking about projects and culminating ideas. She included images of contemporary feminist artworks by artists such as Judy Chicago, Guerilla Girls, Barbara Krueger, and Yoko Ono and facilitated discussion about using gender inequity as a catalyst for art creation. In addition, she showed examples of Afro-American styles of artwork which enacted conversations about race and how it is reflected in artwork. Abby seamlessly and meaningfully blended past art forms with contemporary forms of art, creating layers of meaning and connections that resulted in rich, deep learning. She was excited and passionate about her lesson which, in turn, caused students to engage in the lesson. Ideas revealed were more enduring as a result, and they were rooted in the content to which students could relate.
Additionally, Abby showed images comparing and contrasting advertising of yesterday and today. There was a visual example of a 1960’s Burger King® advertisement next to a current one. Abby discussed how the company changed its logo, subject matter, design, and color choices to keep it fresh and relevant to consumers. Next, she explained how grocery stores nearly tripled their choice of products which influenced design competition across brands. Since every student has been to the grocery stores and has seen these advertisements, it piqued students’ interest as I watched how their eyes were glued to the images and Abby’s explanations.

After that, Abby showed examples of car advertisements of yesterday and today. She discussed how the designers use “never been seen before” visuals to catch the attention of the audience and employ simplistic yet innovative techniques. This is yet another example of using relatable and contemporary forms of visual culture and art.

Related, Abby also showed and discussed NIKE® brand images and how its logo is recognizable by consumers. She explained and showed an example of how the logo was developed by Carolyn Davidson in 1971 for $35.00 and was influenced by the wings of Nike, the goddess of victory. From that small logo investment, NIKE® has expanded as a brand and its revenue has gone way up. Abby further showed current NIKE® advertisements and discussed how even with a dominating image of famous National Basketball Association star LeBron James coupled with an extremely small reference to the logo, people can still identify the brand. At the time, LeBron James was famous for playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team, a local hero for many of the students. Looking around the room, I saw that many students sported NIKE® shoes or attire—clearly, students connected with this discussion on a personal level.

Similarly, Coca-Cola® was shown on the next image as a globally-known brand and Abby described how the company popularized the version of Santa Claus we recognize today.
This is important as students are bombarded by Coca-Cola® advertisements at school, grocery stores, and even on television. It was dually meaningful as the image of the Santa Claus they grew up with and know today was impacted by the brand. Abby’s students seemed to have puzzled looks on their faces while trying to wrap their heads around the idea that the seemingly good spirited nature of their childhood came from the marketing department of the Coca-Cola® Company. I do not think her students had thought how much visual culture has impacted their lives and now the realizations have come to fruition.

Relating to the previously discussed image Abby used in her teaching, another set depicted how fast food advertisements are used in social media and magazines. She discussed how the popularity and effectiveness of these commercial campaigns may have attributed to the tripling of the United States’ obesity epidemic. The United States Department of Agriculture spends just over a third of the amount of money on advertising and informing to help counteract obesity as the fast food chains. Abby supplied statistics illuminating this phenomenon. Abby left her students to think and discuss why children in particular, are so intensely influenced by fast food. Many of them expressed outrage and felt that they were being brainwashed by companies’ advertisements. It seemed that the discussion on visual culture had engaged students in a responsive way and they were realizing as Terry Barrett states, “Images and objects present opinions as if they were truth, reinforce attitudes, and confirm or deny beliefs and values. If the messages carried by visual culture are not interpreted, we will be unwittingly buying, wearing, promoting, and otherwise consuming opinions with which we may not agree” (2003, p.254).

In the final group of images from visual culture, defined as “visual artifacts and performances of all kinds, as well as new emerging technologies, inside and outside the art museum and beliefs, values, and attitudes imbued in those artifacts and performances by the
people who make, present, and use them” (Anderson & Milbrandt 2005, p.238), Abby explained how The Walt Disney Company depicts idealized and stereotyped characters in its media. The Walt Disney Company is what Tavin and Anderson consider a multi-billion dollar oligopoly, an all-encompassing company that owns the following but is not limited to cinema, cable television channels, radio networks and distributes films, videos, music, books, toys, etc. (2003). It may be seen that since Disney is so ingrained in our culture that perhaps it may also shape and reinforce stereotypes and how we see ourselves. Indeed, that is a primary reason Abby chose Disney as current and relevant visual culture to be discussed in her classroom. She began her discussion with facts and stated that just over a third of female Disney characters were shown as thin and attractive. She then asked how they felt evil characters were portrayed. Finally, Abby discussed with students how these types of cartoons and commercials influence girls and boys. She asked students how these images can impact gender roles, appearance, aggressiveness, body image, and diet. Students could truly connect with this presentation: not only were they highly familiar with Disney characters, but this age group is acutely concerned with appearance, gender, and body image thereby making this particular learning experience socially transformative.

Following the presentation of the visual culture images, Abby concluded by showing images of sculptures that focused on communicating a social message. The images of the socially transformative sculptures encompassed a wide range of topics and media. What follows is a description of key works Abby showed. A complete list and descriptions of each can be found in Appendix C.

- *Frozen Assets* by Michael Farley (2008): Plastic water bottles were suspended in an arc from a fountain to give the impression of the bottles being frozen in mid-air so that people can reflect on the amount of waste bottled water produces.
• *Ascension* by Kimi Canete (2010): A lighted giant origami paper crane symbolizing peace and prosperity was created for the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival was meant to cause people to reflect and act in the name of peace.

• *LIVE*: (nd): This was a green concept made of biodegradable materials and was formed into the typography LIVE to motivate and inspire the audience to live in a way that is sensitive to the earth.

• *Ice Bear Project* (2009) by Mark Coreth: This ice sculpture surrounded a bronze skeleton that melted and exposed the skeleton armature. This piece promoted global warming awareness.

• *The Pulse of the Earth* and *The Hunger March* (2009) by Jens GalschiØt: This installation consisted of bronze starving African men with pulsing red LED lights and represented the heartbeat of men and women.

• *Midway- Message from the Gyre* (2009) by Chris Jordan: Photographs of decaying bird carcasses showed objects they consumed rather than food, a comment on society’s mass consumption and waste.

• *Gyre* (2009) by Chris Jordan: A visual of ocean waves that contained 2.4 million pieces of plastic collected from the Pacific Ocean equal to the amount of pounds of plastic pollution that are released into the earth’s oceans each hour.

These images and subsequent discussion further reinforced that artworks can be meaningful and relevant in people’s lives, thus being socially transformative, and helped give students the information and motivation to begin their visual culture projects.
Socially Transformative Visual Culture Project

Inspiration

Following the lessons described in the previous section on design and visual culture, Abby moved on to introduce the assignment loosely referred to as the “visual culture project.” In small student chosen groups or individually, students had to choose an issue of importance to them and of their choice to investigate. Then they needed to find 10 visual examples of the issue currently presented by visual culture. She suggested categories such as: politics, identity, religion, the environment, animal rights, cultural expectations, sexual identity, fashion, gender issues, and school cliques as a starting point. Examples could be photos, commercials, advertisements, and the like. Students were challenged to find opposing as well as many-layered viewpoints and look into the history of the issue, how it has changed over time, what it is telling the viewer, why the message is being communicated, the target audience, its success, and its positive or negative impact. Students then needed to propose a way to explain and state their opinion on the issue whether they agree or disagree. They had to state how and why they would visually represent their issue and detail why their topic was relevant and what they were trying to tell their audience. Abby created this step-by-step process to help students think through and build on ideas and make connections to visually transform these ideas and issues into artworks to create social change.

How Students Reacted: Engagement and Excitement

I observed students as they worked and noticed that they were eager to begin. They had already culminated ideas throughout the discussions and slide shows and gained ideas of meaningful topics important to them. They found other students with the same type of interests and concerns and tended to choose their groups this way. Because of their experience with
previous discussions, students had an idea of how to share information and opinions, and how to think critically. They were able to dialogue and question each other’s thoughts and views as well as understand them. Students were motivated to work hard and visually get their message across to share with others. They wanted to be taken seriously and were willing to work hard, ask questions, and learn about the media they were using to create their projects. They realized that they were stronger working together and often asked other groups or the teacher for critiques and suggestions to improve. Rarely did Abby have to intervene to keep students on task. She did have individual consultations with groups to make sure they were moving in the right direction and so that she could help with anything they were struggling with, whether it was their statement or their sculptural work.

While students were working, I questioned each group and asked what they liked about discussing socially transformative issues. Students overwhelmingly remarked that they feel the issues were relevant to their everyday lives. For example, some of the students had encountered suicide in their lives and this project was a way for them to use the pain they experienced to raise awareness and educate others on the subject. This gave them a positive outlet to counteract a negative event. Abby made sure that her curriculum relates to her students and as a result, empowered them.

The previous activities built up the powerful and impactful student projects on visual culture that made a clear case for the importance of socially transformative curriculum in the art room. The following are descriptions of the student projects.

- *Robbie the Fat Dude* represented a growing problem of obesity in America. Students plaster casted a face and created a large body, covered with wrappers from fast food restaurants; on his stomach, he had a flag with a burger on it.
representing America. The group used the following statistics: 1. The American fast food industry uses $10 billion on advertisements for fast food. 2. The United States Health Department uses $300 million on advertisements attempting to counteract the growing obesity epidemic. 3. This is possibly the first generation that will not outlive its parents. Students posed the question, “Whose fault is it?” They stated, “It’s like a drug. Corporations manipulate us and use colors to play with our minds.” This realization resonated with most of the students as they realized they were no longer passive but critical consumers.

- *Earth/Globe/Hands* was another example of a three dimensional artwork based on a previously made two dimensional artwork of hands coming together. The group chose to plaster cast their hands around a globe which was split apart to show the inside. One hand was left stark white and was molded into a peace sign. The globe was painted blue with green hands to represent the oceans and landmasses. The hands were meant to be the landmasses and were purposefully left unfinished to demonstrate that the world is imperfect even when people try to come together as a whole. As the group moved apart the hands, the inside of the globe exposed bodies, carnage, and bloodshed akin to the blood that has been shed on earth over time, staining the earth. This group of students had three poignant statements about their project: “This is about truth, peace, and love coming together,” “It is easier to hate than to love,” and, “We take our freedoms for granted.” Everyone could relate to this artwork since having gone through middle school and now high school students had worked through a variety of physical, verbal, or situational conflicts whether at home with family members, at school with friends
or teachers, or even seeing conflicts on television. Each of these conflicts was unpleasant to go through and students expressed a strong desire to create more peaceful interactions.

- *Suicide Clock* was a simple yet impactful artwork in which students used a clock to represent the fact that every 16 minutes someone commits suicide and that one cannot turn back time to undo it. The group used red numbers on a black background of the clock and the hours were labeled one through sixteen. A plaster skull with red and black splatter paint rested above the clock, and a noose hung from the center of the clock to represent death. They also mentioned that they created the skull to connect to a topic previously studied in class. Since this group was personally affected by suicide, their creation seemed particularly raw. Classmates responded, noting that the rawness was what echoes the importance of suicide awareness and prevention.

- *Congregation of People* presented a religious statement on how some people take religious belief to the level of being “blinded” by their own faith. The group explained that sometimes there is no rational thinking and that can make people ignorant and intolerant to certain people and their activities, causing them to push their faith on others. Students previously studied artist David Hockney and emulated his style in this photography collage. Student volunteers from the group were taken to a local church, and blindfolded in cloths that the word “FAITH” written on them. They were then told to turn their heads in the direction they thought the camera was facing. The photographic collage resulted in the idea that people that don’t know where or to whom to look for something that cannot
be seen. The group collaged black and white photography because they thought it was more impactful to focus on the repetition of the word, “FAITH,” on the white blindfolds. Many students identified themselves as followers of particular religions, but one girl stated and others agreed that she just realized that she knows many people even in her church that are blind followers.

- **Dog Fights** was an artwork meant to inform the audience about the perils of dog fighting in the United States. The group took a plush toy dog and cut and painted the outside of it to make it look like it had been beaten, bloodied, and neglected. They tied a plastic chain around its neck and attached it to a stake they attached to a poster board. Around the stake was a collage of pictures of abused and/or neglected dogs due to dog fighting. On the poster board around the slain dog, the group wrote facts and statistics on dog fighting. The students wanted the audience to understand two things: 1. Many times, dogs fight to the death and if dogs lose and live without a good track record, they can be beaten to death. 2. Often, dog fighting involves members of gangs and the activity is handed down in the family and often involves children exemplifying the phrase, “violence breeds violence.” Students seemed surprised that dog fighting still exists today and that children would be involved in such a violent act. They were horrified to see what happens to the dogs that lose and felt that stiffer penalties should be enacted to punish participants-- particularly if children are involved.

- **Disease Tree** included multiple meanings of regeneration and rebirth and was created using wrapped wire to form a tree trunk and branches with tags attached to some of the branches with different diseases written on the tags. Instead of a
group, a solo artist explained that the tree equaled life and strength and the fact that it was not quite dead yet meant that there was still hope left. There was a personal connection the student had to friends and family who had suffered with disease. The tags represented people dying from many well-known diseases such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and cancer. The piece was interactive in that tags were meant to be changed by the audience because there is a possibility of change; be it through research, cures, immunizations, etc. Each student raised her or his hand when asked if they had been affected personally by disease or by someone they knew that had suffered from a disease. One student mentioned that it gave a voice to those silently fighting or dying from a disease.

As can be seen in these student examples, not only did the art making transform their target audience of their classmates, but the students themselves transformed their own views, as well. I asked students how this lesson made them feel and their answers were similar in that it made them feel informed, important, and connected them to the “real world” outside of school. Furthermore, this prompted them to want to make changes in the world around them.

Just as there was abundant evidence of powerful and socially transformative learning through art making, there was also evidence of learning during class discussions, group discussions, individual consultations, and critiques in which many students took notes, albeit some more detailed than others. In class during the slide shows some of them enthusiastically asked to see images, such as Chris Jordan’s “Gyre,” or Max Coreth’s “Polar Bear,” again and again. Her students reacted with interest by exclaiming, “Whoa!” “Cool!” “This is Awesome!”

Also seen in this curricular approach was the transformation of some students’ attitudes. This could be seen in one student who, from the beginning, lacked confidence in this drawing
ability and also thought of art class as boring. I could see the transformation of his attitude progress during and after Abby’s presentation. It appealed to him, and one could see that he felt empowered and motivated to create his own socially transformative artwork. Abby even shared with me that Art became his favorite class and was one in which he put a lot of effort.

When I asked a group of Abby’s students working on their artwork to comment on her curriculum, a 17 year old male stated, “Visual culture is more than meets the eye.” I got the distinct feeling that he learned to see beyond the idea that art is pretty, and instead art can be meaningful and a powerful, persuasive, and informative tool. This comment made much sense in light of Abby’s presentation of visual culture and socially transformative artworks.

Following the critique as part of her curriculum, Abby told students they needed to fill out a feedback form for her, reflecting on the lesson. She explained to me that this student feedback shows her what students have learned from the unit and also what she needs to change to improve her teaching to benefit student learning. Abby shared with me that students stated in their own words on their feedback forms that the lesson as relevant, engaging, meaningful, and worthwhile. Students explained that they can use dialogue techniques in school and outside of school. Further, they said that they will now be able employ active listening techniques and be able to discuss issues and differing opinions calmly, which would hopefully model the same techniques for others to employ. Abby explained that students added that they are more informed on many different issues and have realized their own inner voice and values and also feel more important and connected to the world. Students have discovered a creative side and are more compelled to express themselves and gained the desire to make positive changes in their lives and others’ lives (personal communication, 2010). Following the review of student feedback
forms regarding the socially transformative art lesson, it can be concluded that Abby was successful at raising students’ critical consciousness of the culture and society around them.

Abby shared that 75-85% of her curriculum includes socially transformative content and she believes her lessons and approaches to socially transformative art curriculum can be adjusted and made meaningful for any student. For example, she explained to me that if she had a majority African American population, she would tailor her lesson content to their needs. As time goes on, she will need to adjust her curriculum content to keep up with the constantly changing visual culture to keep it relevant to her students.

Abby’s combination of instructional approaches also strengthened her curriculum and helped to meet the different needs of her students. Some students responded really well to her group lectures and images and larger group discussion and activities while others reacted positively from individual consultations and small group work. Some students adapted well to trial and error techniques while creating their artworks, and still others worked best by devising a set plan and relied on their past knowledge of art media to create their visual messages. The fact that their creations were open to any media available to them, was motivating to her students because some were excited to try new art supplies and methods while others were more secure staying with what they knew whether this was clay, plaster, technology, wire, etc. Abby’s current and relatable curriculum content and combination of instructional strategies helped to make her socially transformative lesson successful.
Portrait of a Socially Transformative Art Educator

Through extensive observations, I came to the conclusion that Abby’s curriculum is also successful due to her teacher traits and her ability to create a safe space for learning and expression. How she did this was in large part due to her teacher traits, in particular: her with-it-ness, the ability to empower students, and the ability to build positive rapport with students.

*With-it-ness*

Abby seems to know what is going on in her classroom at all times and the students rarely make negative behavior choices. She has created the perfect “evil eye” and stare that snaps off-task students back into learning mode. I witnessed this when one student was conducting a discussion in the back of the classroom while Abby was teaching and Abby stopped talking and just stared with her “evil eye.” The class went silent and soon the student realized the lack of noise, looked up and changed his behavior and the class continued on as if nothing happened. It was not necessary to raise her voice or yell to change his behavior. Abby also used her proximity of the room to control classroom behavior. Rarely did she stand in one place and speak “at” her class of students as if they were a passive audience. Instead, she walked around the room, looked students in the eyes and conversed with them individually within the group. While moving around the students, she could sense when students were getting “squirrely” and bored, eager to move on, or if they did not understand the material. Students also did not tend to act out when the teacher was near and students monitored their own verbal or physical activities. Also, if a student or group was off task, Abby would call them away from the others to speak with them and ask questions, as many times they would be avoiding work if they didn’t fully understand the material or assignment. In one instance, a small group of students were chatting and not working on their project and Abby asked them if they understood the assignment or if they had questions.
It turned out that they didn’t realize they needed to brainstorm more ideas for their project instead of just writing one down. Instead of letting them fail, or yelling at them to get to work, asking questions handled the situation in a calmer, more productive fashion. This would happen from time to time and it took a couple minutes of questioning and redirecting for the students to be back at work. Good teachers are known to have control and distinct with-it-ness in their classrooms. So, too, is it important to have this with-it-ness when teaching a socially transformative curriculum.

**Empowering Techniques**

As a teacher that practices socially transformative strategies, Abby’s success was enhanced by her techniques that empower her students. She related the material of visual culture, which students were familiar with in their everyday lives, to topics that students felt passionate about in their lives. Topics such as death, disease, animal rights, eating disorders, faith, and diversity hit close to home for her students and giving them the tools and motivation to make a statement for change was empowering. Students no longer felt helpless with issues that were close to them; instead they learned to research their topics and visually express themselves through images. For example, one student watched many people of her family develop different diseases and a couple subsequently died after struggling with coping with their afflictions for a number of years. As a teenager, she told me that she couldn’t do anything to help the situations that were so close to her, until she learned from Abby about how she could use her voice to inform others on diseases. Students have experiences and knowledge and yearn to be heard; in a society where they are receptors, they want to feel important, to want their messages heard and they want others to learn from their messages. Students seem to be more engaged in active
learning where they can apply their knowledge in such a way that empowers expression of their voices.

**Flexibility**

In addition to creating empowering curriculum, Abby was flexible and made sure her students’ needs were addressed. Sometimes, she let students go off on tangents so that they could make their own connections to the material. When students had questions on the images, Abby would have the answer available for the next class, if she did not know the answer. In a discussion about creating her curriculum, Abby told me she was ready and willing to change the visual culture images in order to meet her pupils’ knowledge base. For example, as time goes on from year to year or even semester to semester, visual culture changes. In order to keep the images fresh and relatable, Abby said she was willing to put many hours into revamping her lessons as often as it takes.

Another time Abby showed flexibility in her teaching was when spring semester gave way to many senior activities, field trips, and end of the year events. This meant there were less student work days available and Abby needed to be more strategic in planning her class’s schedule. There were times that last minute changes were made due to the school’s lack of communication or when student activities took precedent. Abby did not allow this kind of interruption to derail her teaching and she made the best out of the time she had with her students that were present and sometimes had to change days for lecture. One day she had to move her senior students to the computer room next door so they could tackle the research component of their projects, including finding suitable images for inspiration so they could catch up to the rest of the class.
Students were also able to work at different paces if one group finished a section of the work before others. One particular group finished their research and image searching before all of the others, so Abby allowed them to begin on the brainstorming section of their project. Later, another group working with photography had already finished their studio portion over the weekend at a church and Abby had them write their artists’ statements and then assist other groups, if needed, while the other groups finished their work.

Abby also offered the flexibility of student choice in their projects. Not only were students able to choose their own groups or work individually, students were also able to choose their topics and media to express their message and information. Students appreciated this approach; as one student remarked to me regarding their project choices, “Some of us can’t draw and others don’t like to paint or sculpt. It is great that we get to choose media according to our abilities and interests.” I feel that student choice helped feed motivation toward their artworks and enhanced the working environment by easing frustration and heightening student interest. This all was intimately connected to Abby’s ability to be flexible in her classroom.

Building and Maintaining Rapport

While flexibility was an important part of the success of Abby’s class, developing positive rapport with her students was also an essential component. Abby built class rapport by showing respect, addressing student needs, and knowing youth culture and contemporary art.

Abby made a point to show all of her students respect. Students were encouraged to ask questions and even silly statements were not met with sarcastic or demeaning retorts, but with patience, understanding, encouragement, and truth. She maintained a professional yet personable and approachable sense of being where students would be willing to ask questions and try new ideas. Praise was given when unique perspectives were shared with the class.
Abby addressed her students’ needs so that they could learn and create without hindrance. She made sure to spend time with each student, meeting with them to ensure learning and understanding of concepts. Abby answered every question and as mentioned earlier, would find answers to questions she did not know and got back to the class with the answer later in the period or the next day. Abby planned work and due dates in reasonable and attainable chunks. This no doubt contributed to the reciprocal nature of respect I saw in the classroom--students clearly had respect for Abby, and she for them. Students knew their questions would be answered respectfully, and that she was a teacher that was going to flex to meet their individual needs. This resulted in visible respect from students. This respect most clearly connected to the level of positive rapport seen and felt in Abby’s classroom.

Knowing her students’ culture and the contemporary art in their lives was an important component of building rapport with her students, as well. Students expressed to me how important it was for her to supply relatable images and material to her students. They mentioned that they appreciated the time and effort it took Abby to create an applicable and interesting curriculum. When students cannot have a sense of being able to relate to the content or the teacher on some level, they lose interest as well as the possibility for building positive rapport.

Creating a Safe Classroom Environment

Connected to but distinct from rapport is the notion of building safe spaces in classrooms in which respect is mutual. Abby was a socially transformative art educator who created a safe space, one in which I visibly saw and felt the flow of respect between her and the students. From day one of the semester, Abby mentioned that respect is demanded in her classroom. She makes sure to treat her students with respect, as any teacher should, but she also ensures that students treat each other with respect, kindness, and care as well. This expectation ensured a safe
environment and was non-negotiable; and students know it. Name calling and put downs were not tolerated. No student was to chide another on their questions or statements made in class. Dialogue was modeled and encouraged; challenging questions and alternate points of view posed, and creative and unique ideas were praised. Differences in personality and ideas were not just tolerated but celebrated as individuality and freedom of choice as long as it did not take away from other peoples’ freedoms of happiness and security. Because Abby would stand up for her students and respect and accept them as individuals with potential for success, in turn, her students would treat her with the same respect and felt free to share new and differing ideas, and felt free to make mistakes and fail. Having the freedom to make mistakes and fail is important because the art making process in the learning I observed involves so much trial and error, experimenting with ideas and expressions, and manipulating different media. Abby explained to me about what she expects from her students’ projects within her socially transformative curriculum:

My goal is to get kids to think beyond just mundane superficial projects. Everything is very conceptually-based, dealing with issues that exist in their close community as well as branching out and dealing with issues that exist in their larger society and world. And really getting them to problem solve through issues through projects and just be very aware of the culture they live in. I told the kids they are going to get far more points by experimenting and pushing themselves than they are if they can make a straight line or painting a perfect picture because I don’t really care about that. I mean it's nice and it looks pretty and occasionally we have projects that focus on that but for the most part that’s really rare, um, I really prefer they push their thinking skills opposed to the product. (personal communication, 2010)
Similarly, in *Art for Life*, Tavin and Anderson explain that, “Good instruction lies in part in helping students to see ‘failure’ as necessary to the experimental, hands-on, exploratory nature of making art--in short, to see it not as failure at all but as a learning experience” (2005, p.150).

Summary

While observing Abby’s class and studying her curriculum, it became apparent to me that her successful lesson did not just rely on her curriculum content alone, nor was it due solely on one teaching method, neither was it all due to her positive rapport with her students. Abby had created a successful learning environment from a culmination of all of these things. It was a lot of hard work up front, but each student’s needs were met somewhere within the lesson’s curricular content, teaching methods, and classroom environment. These conditions seem vital to the success of a socially transformative curriculum.
CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Overview

The previous chapter analyzed data collected through interviews and observations conducted in order to answer the research goal: to find an art teacher that uses socially transformative methods of art teaching in a classroom and discover and identify what approaches the teacher uses and how they are applied in the classroom.

This chapter includes summary, discussion, implications, and recommendations pertaining to the data collected. One art teacher, Abby, was interviewed three times in this case study. I observed her classes and took notes on her methods of teaching as well as the reactions of the students. Students’ artworks were also examined.

There has been much written about socially transformative curriculum in education and in art education. Anderson and Milbrandt explain in *Art for Life*, the reasoning for and examples of what they call Authentic Art Instruction, a notion similar to socially transformative approaches in teaching art. They define it as:

> teaching and learning that have consequences in the real world, both as content that applies outside the classroom and as teaching and learning strategies that are useful in life. Authentic instruction promotes students’ construction of learning in small collaborative groups, expects higher-level thinking, encourages substantive conversation about and responsibility for a topic, and takes a thematic approach to research and learning. (2005, p.234)

Elizabeth Garber (2004) explains that including social justice in art education guides students to develop critical thinking skills and helps them learn to become active democratic citizens. Garber
reminds us that unfortunately implementing social justice in curriculum is not without risk. The socially transformative teacher utilizes good teaching practices in the classroom but not every good teacher is equipped with the knowledge, skill, or motivation to practice this method. This type of teaching takes time to develop and teachers may be retaliated against by administrators and/or community members for daring to change the status quo. I wanted to systematically study how socially transformative art education is successfully taught and experienced. This study provides in-depth analysis and interpretation of a socially transformative teacher of art, thereby making a solid contribution to our understanding of the topic. After analyzing and interpreting the interviews and observations in chapter four, I have concluded that certain teacher traits are vital to execute this type of curriculum.

A Successful Socially Transformative Art Educator in Practice

Teaching a socially transformative curriculum is not for everyone. Dedication is essential, as an art teacher cannot tackle socially transformative curriculum without commitment and enthusiasm. One must be absolutely and unequivocally devoted to a vision, from start to finish, embracing the detours along the way that happen in learning and be prepared to adjust as needed. Abby was committed to making sure that her curriculum met the needs of her students. To be an effective socially transformative educator, Abby has shown that it takes much time and research to prepare for such lessons and be prepared for anything. Students are keen to sense when a teacher is not prepared for class or is not knowledgeable while presenting information. Enthusiasm is also an important quality to exhibit as students tend to mirror your positive energy and interest. During the study, I noted, “Abby had good voice inflection that had helped [engage her students], she was excited and one could tell by her dynamic speaking; She was truly interested in what she was teaching” (Field Notes, 2010). After the final critique, a group of
students discussed how they felt about the project, and they agreed that Abby was very straightforward and competent with providing information and examples; the project was very solid (Field Notes, 2010). Likewise, unpreparedness and apathy can hurt positive rapport and damage lesson progress (Day & Hurwitz, 2012). By observing Abby’s class, I have discovered that it is vital for a socially transformative art educator to know their subject matter well, be prepared for class discussion, and be willing to give up some control of the discussion. Reading from notes suggests lack of confidence in knowledge of the subject; knowing material deeply so that it can be presented organically; in a flow, shows a distinct handle on curriculum knowledge. Purposeful reason for what is presented is also a necessary part of socially transformative teaching. As Day and Hurwitz (2012) and Delacruz (1997) assert, focus in curriculum choices is vital so the teacher can connect material meaningfully, as well as help students find and make connections in the content. Having a prepared focus also helps redirect students when their discussions go astray. There are many layers of complexity in this method and it needs to be broken down to be understandable to students. Scaffolding, that is, the notion of breaking down instruction to a base of knowledge and incrementally adding more information to build upon knowledge and skill (The Glossary of Education Reform http://edglossary.org/scaffolding, 2014), is definitely beneficial as it eases students along a path and builds on what they already know. In teaching socially transformative art curriculum it is key to remember also that we are teaching students how to think, not what to think. Elizabeth Delacruz also supports this view as pertinent:

The notion of teaching as the creation of opportunities for meaningful inquiry means that instruction is centered around teaching students how to pose their own questions, how to
learn and utilize complex thinking processes, how to learn how to learn, and, finally how to identify and solve the problems we have created for them. (1997, p. 87)

When teachers present facts and various sides of issues, they are teaching students how to discover their own stance on a view. On this topic, Abby stated,

I just feel the kids need to be able to interact with society with an intelligent knowledge and responsible level. (…) I guess I do put forth some of my own agenda but you know I believe in open minded thinking. I can’t imagine not wanting to experience everything possible so I want my kids to have that same kind of view and passion about life, not just world view, but be engaged in life. To experience life, but in order to do that you have to be an intelligent person (…) I guess I take account of the situation you are in and make your decision based on that. (personal communication, 2010)

Another essential trait an art educator must have in order to be a successful socially transformative educator is the ability to model desired behavior. Modeling how to be kind, caring, respectful engaged citizens, we model how to seek and understand knowledge of the world we are in, we model how to have dialogue with other engaged citizens and agree or disagree with grace. Being a teacher goes with the understanding that even with thorough preparation, there will be unexpected questions, statements, comments, and complaints at some point, making a teacher’s flexibility so imperative.

A teacher of socially transformative art curriculum needs to be flexible with spontaneous inquiry by students (Day & Hurwitz, 2012). In terms of flexibility, “teachers should always be ready to take detours” (Delacruz, 1997, p.16). Abby came to class fully prepared, yet there were times when she had to be honest with the students and admit she did not know the answer to something. She did promise she would get back to them the next day with the answers to their
question. This honesty, no doubt, added to the positive rapport with her class. Questions may be incredibly challenging in content knowledge, as well as values. One cannot delve into this kind of approach with certain expectations of what ideas or concepts students will choose. Having such a wide range of subject matter to choose from can prompt students to compose wonderfully inventive and creative ideas and products. For some students, it can be frustrating as they may struggle as their attempts at their projects may fail. Other students may possibly come up with projects that deliver messages you may not have thought could be possible or may be offensive to some. Teachers need to respond to students in a useful and specific manner even if what they are saying was not expected (Delacruz, 1997).

The state of being intimately connected and engaged “in the trenches” (as is often the phrase) while teaching is another consideration in teaching socially transformative art curriculum. Things I have noticed Abby doing at a deep level were helping students master the media and producing their projects in such a way that meaningfully speaks to their audience. This kind of questioning and engagement with the students and the process is a hallmark quality necessary to be a successful socially transformative art educator. Delacruz (1997) refers to this quality as “with-it-ness,” a quality she describes as being keenly aware of what is going on in the classroom with all our senses. I saw a high level of with-it-ness in Abby when she walked around the room and positioned herself in different areas, monitoring her students as she lectured or led discussions. Abby demonstrated keen with-it-ness when choosing topics and images from pop-culture for her lessons. As discussed previously, she chose a popular hip-hop video by Jay-Z to deconstruct and discuss the images used in the video. This video was relevant to her students and Abby knew that it would be of interest to them. She shows awareness and engagement with her students’ culture in an empathetic way without judgment for the sake of her students.
A teacher of socially transformative curriculum must also be comfortable with the Socratic teaching method. Socratic questioning is “used to guide students in finding answers” (Day & Hurwitz, 2012, p. 284). While it may take more practice and skill of the teacher and take more time in class, it provokes rich discussion and reveals deeper meanings of artwork and issues. Focused on reasoning and communication, Abby began her lessons by modeling dialogue. She started by asking open-ended questions about the images she showed. Her questions were simple at first, focused on what students visually saw in the images. Next, further inquiry added a layer of complexity; asking students what they thought was going on in the pictures. Adding yet another layer of complexity, Abby asked what the message intention is to the audience and then asked if anyone disagreed and why. She further challenged these views in a non-threatening way, more like “what if…” type of questions. By redirecting negativity, students are able to realize that critiques are not necessarily about negativity towards artwork or artists, but about nonjudgmental observations and discussion (Barrett, 1997). Abby’s students appeared to begin to understand how to execute dialogue. Each question delved deeper and deeper into the layers of their thoughts and understanding by analyzing the information already presented to them. Students were not told they were wrong, only to think more deeply or differently about an issue. Students were encouraged to pose questions to the teacher or each other, as well. Terry Barrett, author of Talking about Student Art (1997) explains that different positions on topics should be argued and explanations for their views should be expected. Students gain deeper meaning by exploring where they stand in what they believe. This thoughtfulness may improve their self-concept and motivate students to make improved artworks. As they became accustomed to this kind of deeper inquiry, I witnessed students automatically apply this high level of thinking in their discussions in class--within their groups
and within their critiques. I saw time and time again students searching for deeper understanding
of topics by asking question after question about issues and urging for others to seek knowledge
as well. Students questioned each other as well as Abby and also used the Internet as a source for
information. This was a direct result of Abby’s mastery of the Socratic method of teaching. Once
it is mastered, an educator can focus their role as more of a facilitator for classroom discussion
(Barrett, 1997; Delacruz, 1997). Importantly, taking a step back from being within the dialogue
empowers students to use their voice amongst their peers.

While it is understandable that one may have strong feelings about some topics, it is
important to withhold one’s opinions from students as their voice needs to be respected. Students
need time for their own discoveries and interpretations (Garber, 2004; Barrett, 1997).

“Education must not only transmit culture but also provide alternative views of the world and
strengthen the will to explore them” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005, p.231). Abby made it clear
throughout her lessons that she was not sharing her views on issues with her students until the
last day of class because she did not want to influence their thinking. She honored the
democratic space that was created in her classroom and respected all voices that were shared.

I am very open with my kids that everybody has different opinions and I after they’ve shared
their opinions, I cautiously share mine so that it doesn’t influence them too much but I tell
them that they are allowed to discuss anything that they want and I bring up a lot of different
issues so that they know they don’t have to be afraid of discussing anything. The kids know
they can come and talk to me. Usually they feel confident enough to just say it in front of the
entire class. I’ve had a couple kids who come after class, pull me aside to talk to me about
something and, um, everything is really laid back so the kids know that they have carte
blanche to really discuss what they need to. (personal communication, 2010)
Feedback is constant in this class with peer group critiques, class critiques, and teacher facilitated critiques. Abby models what Barrett (1997) says students think are good critiques: guided by a leader with a sense of purpose; those in which the students could speak and participate; and those that included more than judgments—and when judgments were offered, they were positive as well as negative and were accompanied by reasons and sometimes explicit criteria. (pp. 4-5) Providing facts, describing, critically observing, and interpreting content are some strategies we teach students when critiquing artwork (Barrett, 1997; Day & Hurwitz, 2012). Students in this study in the beginning looked for affirmation and feedback from Abby via one-on-one discussions, but then learned and gained confidence in effective dialogue, building trust in their classmates as well as in the safe space Abby created in which all voices and opinions were honored. Students increasingly reached out to others in their group and even to those in other groups for feedback on their artworks. Abby’s students seemed to begin to trust and realize that others were not out to insult another’s project, but instead they were there to get the most understanding out of it and push each other to do even better. Abby implemented different critique approaches because different students benefit from different types of interactions. The feedback given in the beginning was teacher given, but with practice and guidance, it eventually moved to more teacher facilitated critiques and then more toward a student facilitated critique for their final evaluation. In the final critique of the Visual Culture Project, Abby’s students actually took the lead as they knew the routine of discussion and dialogue, so it was akin to a deep conversation among peers.

Not only was feedback focused for the students, but Abby sought out feedback from her students about her teaching. After the final project critique, Abby passed out a questionnaire
asking for students’ thoughts and opinions on her lesson. This collection of feedback is one way to improve curriculum and teaching methods to better suit the needs of students. She mentioned to me that she wanted to add more images and movies to her discussions as well as add information and images on Baroque art to make it more dynamic (personal communication, 2010). As part of Abby’s summative assessment of her curriculum, I was granted access to the questionnaires. I perused the questionnaires and determined that her students were genuinely satisfied with the class. They wrote that they enjoyed seeing so many different images and taking part in dynamic dialogue and appreciated the creativity and freedom of the assignment. Overwhelmingly, the most quoted problematic feature of the lesson was the lack of time given to students to work on their projects. This was mainly due to the majority of seniors being in the class and at the end of the school year; they were pulled out of class for a variety of senior activities. A teacher of socially transformative art curriculum is clearly open to feedback from his or her students, as exemplified by Abby.

Another essential trait of a successful socially transformative educator is creating a “safe” environment. A safe environment is essential to authentic dialogue and feedback where all students feel safe to participate and willing to discover their voice (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Ballangee-Morris, Daniel & Stuhr, 2010; Day & Hurwitz, 2012; Garber, 2004). Abby was willing to allow her students to make mistakes. Also, she was willing to defend her students if another teacher or administrator had a problem with the subject of the project. I tell my kids whenever we start discussing a lesson that they need to be able to question everything and they need to be able to decide if the information I give them is right based on their needs and their information because everything I tell them while I’m trying to give them as an unbiased view and as historical a view as possible, it is still my interpretation of that
view so I tell them they should be doing that with all of their teachers, they should be questioning the information that is given to them but I am giving it to them, so hopefully at some point they would be able to use that kind of thinking in their own minds and I’ve never had—even with some of the pretty touchy subjects that my kids do, I’ve never been called out by the principals or anything like that. If I would, I would definitely defend my kids, I told them that. (personal communication, 2010)

Another essential teacher trait of the socially transformative art educator is the ability to build positive rapport with students. Positive rapport can be built when students know that their teacher is willing to defend them over a class project. This caring attitude and student support helps improve self-concept (Ballangee-Morris, Daniel & Stuhr, 2010) and will enhance student participation and expression (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). This rapport helps build a safe environment which should also extend to risk taking in their projects. When students know that they can try new approaches in their projects and even if they fail they can still pass, students will feel more confident to use more creative expression in their artworks. Abby stated:

…I told the kids they are going to get far more points by experimenting and pushing themselves than they are if they can make a straight line or painting a perfect picture because I don’t really care about that. (...) I really would prefer that they push their thinking skills opposed to product. (personal communication, 2010)

Issues That Affect All: A Sample of Social Issues and Their Importance for Inclusion in a Socially Transformative Curriculum

Some students are bullied in class, in hallways, and outside school for any number of reasons. Maybe they don’t have the top of the line clothing, shoes, iPods®, or cell phones. Parents might pick up their child from school in an old rusted out car on its last wheel, spouting
off clouds of dark exhaust, giving bullies an excuse to practice social superiority. In any case, social class is upheld even at school. Any of these situations impede student learning for all. Bullying can meaningfully be addressed in a social justice curriculum, focusing on a variety of related issues. Some of these issues that will next be addressed include gender inequity, heteronormativity and racial discrimination. These issues were chosen because they are phenomena that affect the lives of all students on some level and are particularly important to address. In the art classroom, deconstructing images from visual culture forces students to reflect consciously on their lives and provides them the chance to think critically about topics such as gender, race, and heteronormativity (Staikidis, 2013). In addition, these are issues that are particularly important to the author. While Abby’s students in this study did not choose to focus on these issues, she briefly introduced the topics in discussion. In the past, some of her classes chose to concentrate more on them depending on student need. Teachers need to be brave and prepared to tackle controversial issues such as gender equity, heteronormativity, and racial discrimination in their classroom because they are issues that relate to and affect students’ lives and will inevitably come up in class discussion at some point.

Gender Inequity

Gender equity in schools has been an issue for years. Some people feel that women’s suffrage in the 1920’s was the solution to women’s problems. Since women could vote, own property, and collect inheritance much of society felt that women and men are treated equal. Truly this is not the case as gender inequity clearly still exists in schools. The National Art Education Association (NAEA)’s Women’s Caucus indicates a need for gender equity in education. The website states that the Women’s Caucus “exists to eradicate gender discrimination in all areas of art education, to support women art educators in their professional
endeavors, and to educate the general public about the contributions of women in the arts” (http://naeawc.net/mission.html, 2014). Their website includes resources on their website for educators to utilize including: feminist art resources, feminist journals, and research reports on gender issues in art education. A key publisher of art education resources published *Gender Matters in Art Education* (Rosenberg & Thurber, 2007), a book directed towards kindergarten through higher education educators, which discusses the need for gender equity in art education, what gender equity looks like in art education, and strategies for implementing gender equity in the classroom. This publication is indicative of the importance NAEA places on gender equity as an issue worthy of study.

Gender inequity was a key issue recognized in Blackburn’s (2007) study where six student participants in a safe environment were encouraged to share experiences related to social change. The participants involved reported that they did not meet their schools’ status quo; that they were perceived as “different.” The participants discussed gender roles, how they were enforced, and how they were broken. The students then expressed that in their experiences peers enforce gender rules through isolation, verbal harassment, and physical abuse. Many participants retaliated and were alienated from their peers. This caused students to feel alone and out of place and took on negative labels. Some students were even advised by counselors and principals to conform to the status quo and as a result, most of these students dropped out of school. The student participants explained that since many teachers do not enforce school rules, many feel unsafe. One would think that if students were harassed daily and felt unsafe, that they would have trouble focusing in school, be unmotivated to finish schoolwork, therefore hindering learning. The result of this study encourages educators to empower students, gain stronger
identities, and challenge societies’ problems. These are key components of a social justice curriculum.

In the art classroom, a 1992 study of inequities in the classrooms showed that boys got more attention than girls, received more challenging interaction than girls, more constructive feedback, and more wait time than girls (Rosenberg & Thurber, 2007). However, according to Gurian and Stevens (2004), due to advocacy, attention is now being paid to issues girls experience in the classroom. At the same time, boys are now underperforming in schools earning 70 percent of Ds and Fs and 90 percent of discipline referrals. It seems that the teaching methods utilized in classrooms are more attuned to female learning styles while expecting the male students to compensate and follow along (Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Tyre, 2013). Elizabeth Fennema (2000) explains in her article, *Gender and Mathematics: What is Known and What Do I Wish Was Known* that girls tend to learn using concrete strategies such as counting, whereas boys tend to learn using more abstract approaches. Since boys and girls learn differently, Gurian and Stevens suggest using a variety of teaching methods to meet the learning styles of both male and female learners.

Many times gender issues are either ignored in classrooms or used as opposites such as masculine vs. feminine. But life is not an either/or scenario--rarely does a person fit into just one category. Also, there are gender roles that are generally upheld in the classroom where boys are expected to like drawing action and military themes, and are more active and boisterous, where girls are supposed to act submissively and quietly and to like the color pink. However, science says that it is nurturance that molds children’s personalities. According to Rosenberg and Thurber (2007), anthropologists and sociologists have discovered that given the chance, boys can become nurturers and girls can become leaders. Children and society are socialized to believe
otherwise. The problem is that if one deviates from that norm, it can make them a target for bullying.

In many historical artworks, men are depicted as more powerful, more important, and as leaders; women are portrayed as helpless, dependent, nude, and/or innocent. According to Collins and Sandell (1984), females are underrepresented in the art world as only about 40% of artists are women and their artwork is exhibited about 20-25% of the time. Women’s art is commonly considered less precious, ingenious, and significant. This is an issue in the art classroom because it sends negative messages to students about females in the art world.

Some suggestions for those art educators that want to promote gender equity in their schools or classrooms might be to discover women artists, to recognize them as artists, validate their abilities and artwork, and attempt to eliminate bias in this field. It is important for the modeling of peers and adults, use and encourage bias-free communication, show leadership equity, address gender stereotypes, and discourage discrimination (Rosenberg & Thurber, 2007). Teachers should educate themselves, reflect, apply ideas, values, and approaches to life and classroom to eliminate bias from their program.

*Heteronormativity*

Another issue affecting the lives of our students is heteronormativity. For those students that lie outside the heterosexual norm or are even perceived to exist outside the heterosexual norm, they may face bullying from fellow students, teachers, administrators, or the public. Many teachers are afraid of trying to address the issue within the school community because they fear being called gay themselves, or reprimanded in some way by administration, whether it affects the teacher’s tenure, promotion, or employment. Schools are battlegrounds for culture wars (Meyer & Stader, 2009). For example, teachers and administration tend to enforce heterosexual
gender norms, or heteronormativity, and as a result, many students face discrimination, rejection, and hostility. In 2005, Meyer and Stader identified that 90% lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth were harassed or assaulted and only one in five administrators make efforts to create a safe environment, reinforcing that heteronormativity is indeed an issue that needs to be addressed in the schools. A social issues curriculum could be the appropriate vehicle to accomplish this.

Equally compelling, Reis (2008), reflects on a murder of a young gay student, explaining that ignorance causes problems, including tragedy. In order to prevent these problems and tragedies, teachers and administrators must be motivated to address this problem and training on intervention is necessary to do so. Teacher education can prepare new teachers to be comfortable and confident about addressing issues and implement curriculum and activities addressing and challenging these activities (Meyer & Stader, 2009). The need for teacher education exists as demonstrated in Avery’s (2009) study in which the researcher inquired whether teachers are willing to approach topics of sexism and heterosexism in the classroom, whether they feel they are equipped to approach these topics and if they feel their students are receptive of such topics. Avery sent a survey to random Ohio art teachers from around the state asking teachers to answer questions on the subject. The results reported that a majority of teachers feel that they would be willing to discuss sexism and heterosexism in the classroom, but feel ill equipped to discuss or intervene in a situation concerning the subject. Some teachers wrote back that they would like training on these topics and be taught how to handle situations pertaining to these issues. The researcher concludes the study by stating that more research is necessary on the subject matter to provide additional resources to teachers.
In the context of controversy surrounding the issues of sexual identity, Lampela (1996) explains that educators can influence students’ attitudes and influence values however, the issues of sexuality and homosexuality threatens traditional cultural ideology in schools. This creates a culturally diverse society mentality versus fundamentalists, community leaders, and parents who think that sexuality and homosexuality is a sin and/or mental disorder. Lampela agrees with others in that unfortunately, educators who approached the controversial subjects of sexuality were threatened with loss of tenure, promotion, reputation, and personal safety.

The LGBT community is underrepresented in the art classrooms. Some teachers may feel that discussing an artist’s sexuality is not important to the lesson, or that the subject matter does not connect to the lesson. They overlook the fact that they may speak of another artist’s mistresses, wife, children, or social life, but when it comes to the homosexual artist, all that the teacher may discuss is what the artwork looks like or what students think it represents. Sometimes, teachers avoid showing work from homosexual artists altogether to avoid any potential conflicts with students, parents, or administration. But by avoiding conflict, one is supporting the status quo and students will continue to be outcast or bullied due to their sexuality or perceived sexuality (Lampela, 1995).

Blackburn (2007) suggests including homosexual artists to make an accepting atmosphere and encourage diversity in classrooms. Lampela (1996) adds that homosexuality and sexuality should be as important as any other difference such as gender, culture, or disability. Providing positive LGBT role models to create a safe and accepting environment for all students so that all students’ needs are addressed and considered is also suggested (Blackburn, 2007; Lampela, 1995). While it may be challenging to find information on LGBT artists, there are sources that are willing to help (1995). An LGBT caucus such as the NAEA Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual, Transgender Issues Caucus (LGBTIC) helps educators with awareness, education, research, and addressing issues.

It is important for administrators to know that supportive teachers who confront, incorporate, and advise LGBT curriculum and then face repercussions for doing so are being defended by Equal Protection, Title IX, Equal Access Act, and state laws, and that many courts are holding the schools liable (Meyer & Stader, 2009). The bottom line is that schools need to fairly and consistently apply policies that are not indifferent, that are reasonable, and that ensure the safety of each and every student. The National Art Education Association (NAEA) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Issues Caucus (LGBTIC) was formed in 1996 and proves there is need to address heteronormativity in education. Its purpose is “to make visible lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues within the field of art education. It is poised to actively work against misrepresentation and bias in our culture and teaching institutions to produce safer spaces for all people in our schools and society” (http://www.arteducators.org/community/committees-issues-groups/lgbtic, 2014). The NAEA special interest group, LGBTIC also promotes further research in the field to aid teachers on implementing these issues in their curriculum. This attention, again, to issues that affect all students, is necessary in a social issues curriculum.

Racial Discrimination

Another issue of both historical and contemporary importance and certainly worthy of inclusion in a social issues curriculum is that of racial discrimination. Racial topics have always been significant in education, but ever more so with a dramatic rise of increasing complexity of diversity in our schools today (Nieto, 2004). When dynamics in society change, those in privileged positions in society inevitably want to maintain the status quo of power structures. Related, Darden (2009) states that in many classrooms teachers do not talk about race, ethnicity,
and differences constructively—even amongst colleagues. Often, whites are taught that speaking of race is impolite and fear being called racist. But as a result, ethnicities often become the subject of stereotypes (Burkeholder, 2007). In that same light, Scruggs (2009) suggests that racial color blindness (not talking about differences) actually benefits the majority because the majority does not have to question their race, sexuality, or gender. While it is important for teachers to learn about their students’ cultural experiences, they cannot if they refuse to “see” others’ differences. Socially transformative education can help teachers and students acknowledge their own personal beliefs and constructively address differences in the learning environment (Kumashiro, 2004).

Stereotypical comments continue even today as Scruggs (2010) documented: a teacher asked an African American student, “Why on earth would a black kid want to study German?” Now an adult, this student who was ridiculed by a teacher has chosen to discuss racial differences with her children and to confront their teachers with any racial issues that may come up. Another example cited by Scruggs concerned a Bolivian student. She struggled against racism from Mexican students because they did not identify with her culture. She also suffered from discrimination from white American students because they thought she was Mexican. Perhaps surprising to some, minority students can also face discrimination from their peers who may feel they are deserting their culture by becoming one of the few perceived high achievers of their race in their community. Socially transformative curriculum can help teachers and students recognize discrimination in their schools and classrooms and empower them to create change (Shor, 1992).

It can be reasoned that these are indeed contentious issues; but teachers need to have the courage to confront them. These are relevant issues affecting students’ lives inside and outside of
the school walls and students need a non-judgmental, knowledgeable adult to help guide discussions pertaining to such topics. Through my observations and experience, students are resilient and not only able to address such issues maturely, but in a way that is empowering to them.

Challenges to Implementing a Socially Transformative Art Curriculum

Despite the positive outcomes and powerful learning that happens in a socially transformative art classroom such as was Abby’s, the approach is not without challenges. Abby was lucky to have the ability to help create her district’s art curriculum to include socially transformative teaching. She felt supported by her colleagues, community and students. Her preparedness, demeanor, and passion helped her in this way. However, after analyzing the data it became clear that there are some contexts in which it would be difficult or challenging to utilize socially transformative teaching methods. A school or community environment with an unsupportive or hostile atmosphere may discourage independent thinking, particularly in the realm of visual culture or controversial issues. Colleagues, the community, or those in power may stress that there is only one way of thinking on certain issues (or be in disagreement if students’ and teachers’ views deviate from the community majority) and that you must teach that way of thinking. In this instance, one would have to use his or her own discretion whether or not to use socially transformative art curriculum and to what degree it is used. As stated previously, one needs to know his or her population he or she is working with in order to appropriately apply this teaching method. Informed caution and research into community values would be a prudent measure. Likewise, one does not need to solely teach using socially transformative curriculum or even include controversial issues as topics of discussion. The art educator should use his or her own curriculum goals, skill level, experience, and motivation as a basis to aid lesson creation.
One may argue that the traits of a socially transformative educator are that of good teaching practices. While that is true, not every teacher that utilizes good teaching practices are capable of teaching socially transformative lessons. Socially transformative educators possess the motivation and passion for teaching these lessons. They emit this passion with enthusiasm in the classroom that engages their students. They are dedicated to raising the critical consciousness of the culture and social issues around them.

Another challenge is that socially transformative curriculum may be unsuitable for some learners. There may be certain populations of learners that may not have the ability to contribute or understand the level of deep discussions that socially transformative curriculum entails. For example, this approach may be inappropriate for classes with specific intellectual or behavior disabilities or challenges. In these instances, there may be students whose IEPs state that they only be involved in the art making part of art class due to low cognition and the inability to understand the depths of conversation or knowledge of issues. It is the responsibility of the art teacher to adjust curriculum to include students with special needs in dialogue and other activities beyond art making through alternative methods. These methods, according to Gerber & Guay (2006), could include picture cues to indicate agreement or disagreement, communication boards to help illustrate ideas, visual reference charts to redirect student attention to key information, and picture instructions to outline complex directions. It is helpful to focus on the learning objectives of the lesson and clarifying and simplifying as needed. Some students learn best if discussion starts with very concrete thinking with concepts they can personally relate to and gradually working towards abstract and higher order thinking. Every learner is unique and it is advantageous for art educators to ask the expertise of the students’ paraprofessionals or other relevant student support colleagues to aid your goals. These professionals most likely know their
students’ abilities and goals as well as useful knowledge to simplify, modify, or adapt lessons. Including and accommodating all students is not optional in the socially transformative art classroom.

Implications for Further Research

Historically, art education has enjoyed freedom in curricular content. There are not many subjects with such broad content standards in which instructors are free to make decisions about what they teach. This may be overwhelming to some pre-service art education students who have such an expansive collection of images, subject matter, themes, and methods to choose from. Different teachers are sometimes better suited for certain teaching methods over others due to the issues previously raised. Pre-service education needs to be adjusted to include socially transformative teaching methods and creating socially transformative lessons and practice teaching as part of a balanced approach, one that presents many options. Socially transformative art teaching takes practice and it certainly helps to have a mentor familiar with this curriculum and teaching methods to guide learning and execution. Therefore, more field experience is needed at the university level to ensure teachers are ready to take on this practice. More teachers, including professors, need to be educated in order to help pre-service teachers become proficient at this. In order to ensure professors and pre-service education programs include socially transformative art education curriculum and practice, we need to improve advocacy for socially transformative art education. If people are not aware of this type of curriculum or practice, they will not know the importance, nor will they support it. I assert that socially transformative art education be a meaningful component in pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities in order to provide another way of teaching art that is meaningful.
In Conclusion

In a socially transformative art classroom it is important for teachers to know their students and amend curriculum to meet their students’ needs. This can be a daunting task because it often has to be done in a short period of time, as art teachers have limited student interactions. Sometimes art teachers, particularly at the elementary level, may see their students for only 30 or 45 minutes once a week. It would be beneficial to the field for more study to focus on lessons or activities that can identify students’ needs in a relatively short period of time. This would especially aid art teachers that feel they do not have the time to execute socially transformative curriculum. Studying the age-relevance of this kind of teaching is also needed.

I was lucky to attend Kent State University whose art education program includes socially transformative teaching in their field classes. Through study and practice in this program, I became confident using socially transformative curriculum and have used it in my art classrooms. I feel Kent State University’s pre-service art education could be a model for pre-service art education programs elsewhere.

In conclusion, socially transformative art curriculum can be beneficial to a variety of art programs whether it is used as individual lessons within an art program, or whether it is the entire curriculum. As stated previously, it is not for everyone to take on. One must consider his or her own personality, knowledge, enthusiasm, and environment before teaching this way. Learning to teach this way can be a challenging task, but incredibly rewarding for all.
APPENDIX A

Inspiration for Socially Transformative Lessons

I have personally taught each one of these lessons various times with many different groups of students, some from very different demographics. These serve as only a broad guide to help one get started, as the lessons will need to be altered and adjusted to meet your students’ needs. It will be necessary to research information on each of these topics to gain a solid understanding of the material to present these effectively to students.

- Tolerance Posters/Murals- Celebration of Differences

Concepts of slogans, design concepts, audience/viewers, and other processes associated with other products of communication and design are discussed. Students produce examples of each art term covered and will include those learned in the final design. Students will talk about discrimination, tolerance, bullying and the importance of positive language and actions. Videos on differences and posters to promote acceptance can aid in this project. Relevant videos, books, and other sources of information that are useful for socially transformative lessons can be found for free at the Teaching Tolerance website at [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org). Students design and create a poster to promote positive actions and tolerance and awareness of differences in the school.

- Book of Character

Students choose a character trait from a list or come up with their own. They must construct definitions and a number of symbol or symbols that might represent their character trait.
When finished, they are displayed like illuminated pages in the Book of Kells with the images/illumination on one side and an artist’s statement on the right side mounted on a colorful piece of paper. Discuss and show examples of the Book of Kells with students and show examples of the Book of Kells. Students will learn about illumination, symbols, repetition, colors, lettering, and the like and how to tell stories through symbols and pictures with minimal use of text words usage.

- Graphic Design: Social Issues

Students learn the artistic concepts of themes, symbols, lettering, repetition, pattern, manipulation, color, focal point, statement, audience, and borders. Discuss qualities of good and bad design, and examples of both in advertisements. Identify which qualities make them successful or not in communicating their intended message. In the past, I have even included examples of my design work--some failures and some successful. Students then discuss social issues that are important to them, how it affects them, what happens, reactions, what needs to be done to make changes to have the most impact. Students then choose an issue, research it, then artistically express their experience with that issue. It is recommended that the use of technology be employed in at least one way (such as photo manipulation, insertion of video, reproduction of the image, etc.) In this lesson, in-process feedback and critiques are recommended, much like Abby’s approach in what constructive criticism is the focus. A formal student-led critique then can be held at the end of the lesson. This lesson can be amended so that students create three-dimensional artworks.
• Recycled Communities

Students will identify and discuss key facilities and infrastructure that make up a city. Interactive technologies such as SMART Boards have several relevant programs students that can engage students to visually create a virtual town that are fun. Students will discuss the earth, ecology, the benefits of recycling, as well as the hazards from lack of resources, knowledge, and care. Images and video of these concepts are shown to reinforce these topics. Deriving information from this discussion, students can choose parts of the city they wish to create. Using recycled materials, students will create three dimensional sculptures signifying components of towns. Students will then collaborate with their classmates to put their individual models together to create a complete, diverse town. Alternatively, students can create entire towns in small groups, collaborate with other classes or grades in the school or create different types of communities such as cities, farming communities, and suburbs.

• Teaching Younger Students Character Building

Students will learn the definition of character traits and brainstorm a list of character traits as a class. Small groups will then choose a character trait from the list and create their own definition of that trait. Students will then work together as a small group to create a story that can teaches a lesson to younger students, peers, or adults about that trait. Their stories can then be used to create art in a number of constructive, meaningful ways. For example, students of various skill levels can learn the art making skills to create puppets and scenery that coincide with their stories. Then, they can use their puppets to create live or recorded performances for their intended audience or audiences. Another approach that a socially transformative teacher may take is to combine their stories with a lesson on illustration,
which could be as simple two-dimensional creations, or as complex as pop up books. One can then engage students in a book binding lesson and they can then bind their own books as part of the lesson, or they can be sent to be professionally bound. This socially transformative lesson can be adjusted to be as technologically advanced and complicated as one can manage, as time allows, and as students can handle.

- Peace Cranes

In this lesson, students will be involved in dialogue about topics such as bullying, war, or cancer with the goal of building empathy amongst the students. The class will read the story of Sadako and the thousand paper cranes and reflect on how Sadako was affected by leukemia due to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan in World War II. In addition, students will discuss how community worked together to help Sadako finish her goal of folding one thousand paper cranes in the name of peace—even after her death. Learners will then brainstorm to think of a peer or community member relevant to their lives that they would want to emotionally support as a group and why. They will then learn how to fold origami paper cranes and as a class, engage in folding one thousand paper cranes to present to the individual the class chose to help. There are various ways to engage students and break up the monotony of the lengthy, arduous task of creating one thousand paper cranes. One such way would be to have contests including: who can fold the most precise paper crane, who can be the fastest to fold a paper crane, and who can fold the smallest paper crane. Students showed excitement while taking part in these contests and also enjoyed engaging in friendly competition with their instructor. Another method to further vary and liven this lesson is to challenge students to see what other designs or symbols they can create by
putting groups of similarly colored paper cranes into shapes. Examples of such symbols and designs can include emoticons, peace signs, and patterns and can be viewed at the Hiroshima Peace Park in Japan. More advanced students can use their one thousand paper cranes to create a larger three dimensional sculpture using an armature as a base.

- “Hands of Hate” Lesson

Ryan Cassata is a transgender singer/songwriter/public speaker/activist who by the relatively young age of 20, has had many accomplishments in his life including but not limited to: winning the first ever Harvey Milk Memorial Award upon graduating in 2011, being keynote speaker at the Philadelphia Trans-Health Conference in 2012, and cutting seven records and touring the country performing his music (http://www.ryancassata.com, 2014). Cassata is a young man passionate about promoting peace through his music, his videos, and his activism. He makes time for speaking engagements at schools and universities across the nation to bring awareness to and educate others on transgender issues and to promote peace, love, and acceptance for all. He is a great role model who creates videos and music that can inspire and motivate students to be active agents of change. In particular, his music video Hands of Hate (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM9v55aTu3M&list=PLjtW40TPKBRgt9_bUgFlqsm My6wgd_KbYby, 2014) is a particularly powerful work that is moving to students and identifies the relevant issues of suicide and violence in the LGBT communities. Cassata’s purpose of this video is to bring about social change through coming together as a society demonstrating love, not hate. After showing the Hands of Hate music video, a copy of the lyrics can be distributed and its meaning should be discussed to uncover and identify the layers of meaning in the images in the video and the lyrics in the song. If appropriate, students should be encouraged to research and discover the underlying stories that inspired
this video. With the knowledge they have obtained by researching the images and lyrics, students can reflect on personally relevant issues and bring awareness to these issues through two dimensional or three dimensional artwork. One specific goal of this lesson is to relate to students by raising awareness of issues that may affect them and empower these learners by giving them a voice using art as a vehicle for change.
APPENDIX B

Transcribed Thesis Interviews

Transcribed Interview #1

Me: Could you describe your schooling background?

Participant: Um, I went to Kent State University for five years where I got my bachelor's in education- BS first bachelor's in education in integrated language arts, then I student taught. Then I continued on and got my BFA- bachelor's of art in English, minor in studio arts and art history, and then my post bacc in art education, and now I'm working on my master’s.

M: Ok…Alright. Could you describe your experience teaching? Is it as a plethora as the rest of your schooling?

P: Um, yeah my experience has been good. I um usually have uh 6-7 preps a semester. Um and I have seven classes, it’s not uncommon for me to run two classes during one class. I have to monitor kids working. The kids have been very open to …I’m not sure exactly what you want from this question…

M: From this question? Um, I am looking for what you taught, where you taught, those sort of things. The other questions are coming up.

P: Ok, I’ve only taught at High School X. This is my 7\textsuperscript{th} year teaching. And I have taught 3-D one, 3-D two, drawing and painting, photo I, photo II, I designed the art history I and art history II course, um AP 3-D and AP 2-D, um art foundation which is our entry level course, and I think that’s it.

M: That’s a lot.

P: Yes

M: In 7 years

P: Yes, well that’s still what I teach now, almost every semester I teach that.

M: All of those?

P: Yes. That’s why I have a different class almost every period

M: Ok, alright. Why did you decide to go into art education?

P: Um honestly, I was looking for something to do. I graduated and I already had a teaching degree in English and had already student taught in English and I really didn’t enjoy it and I
knew I didn’t want to go down that track and that’s why I went and got all the other degrees to figure out what I was gonna do and then decided to go on and teach art and enjoy it.

M: Have you always done art? Like before your degree?

P: Um I took uh actually my freshman year of high school my mother was called in and the teacher told her to take me out of art classes and not let me take them anymore. And then I started taking them again my junior and senior years with different teachers but didn’t think it was going to be a viable occupation so I didn’t pursue it in my first couple years of college.

M: Ok, what is your goal in art education?

P: My goal is to get kids to think beyond just mundane superficial projects. Um everything is very conceptually-based, deal with issues that exist in their close community as well as branching out and dealing with issues that exist in their larger society and world. And really getting them to problem solve through issues through projects and just be very aware of the culture they live in.

M: Cool. Ok, now considering that, do you ever had an issue with what you teach, the way you teach, the topics you teach?

P: Not yet no, I haven’t had any problems. Um I’ve had…I really haven’t.

M: Do you have any idea why?

P: Um I tell my kids whenever we start discussing a lesson that um they need to be able to question everything and they need to be able to decide if the information I give them is right based on their needs and their information because everything I tell them while I’m trying to give them as an unbiased a view and as historical a view as possible it is still my interpretation of that view so I tell them they should be doing that with all of their teachers, they should be questioning the information that is given to them and should by no means have to agree or continue on using the information I give them but I am giving it to them so that hopefully at some point they would be able to use that kind of thinking and their own minds and I’ve never had…even with some of the pretty touchy subjects that my kids do, I’ve never been called out by the principals or anything like that. If I would, I would definitely defend my kids, I told them that.

M: What kind of controversial subjects do you talk about?

P: Hmm. We’ve talked about anything from genocide and ethnic cleansing to um sexual identity, suicide, we do quite a bit with xenophobia and taking on the role of someone that you completely disagree with just to gain an understanding of their point of view whether you like it or not um step in someone else’s shoes to see where they come from um any issues with race, identity, um,
I don’t know. I’m really firm on telling my kids that when they pick a project they really need to pick a side, pick a stance and not be afraid to voice their opinions.

M: And for the most part what are your reactions from your students?

P: Pretty good, some of them don’t push it as far as I would like to, um but I don’t know if that’s simply because they are digesting the information and later on they will you know go to that next level which I have heard back from kids in college who said they get it now but um usually the higher I guess cognitive thinking kids they turn out their projects really get into the issue and their work becomes more about the concept of their piece than their final product.

M: Yeah. Is that ok?

P: I’m fine with that I told the kids they are going to get far more points by experimenting and pushing themselves than they are if they can make a straight line or painting a perfect picture because I don’t really care about that. I mean it’s nice and it looks pretty and occasionally we have projects that focus on that but for the most part that’s really rare, um, I really would prefer that they push their thinking skills opposed to product.

M: Um could you describe your demographic please?

P: Um, probably 97-98% white, probably equal as far as gender goes: male-female um I have two students from south America right now but that’s it as far as any kind of there is like 15 African American kids in our school? I don’t have any of them? … Well I have one, I have one but that’s it. It’s um, it’s pretty pathetic as far as cultural diversity which is another reason that we push a lot of different issues because the kids just don’t have, they don’t, they live in a conservative view of the world and I guess on that point I am surprised I haven’t gotten flack because it is such a conservative community. Maybe the kids just don’t take it home with them? I don’t know.

M: Or maybe it opens their eyes?

P: Maybe I don’t know

M: Um, so I guess a kind of follow up to that, I guess you sort of described it, could you describe your school climate and class atmosphere?

P: Um out there in the halls it’s pretty conservative. Kids are expected to fit into niche, their group. And they definitely don’t want to buck the system. And I told um my kids that I this is a fairly open atmosphere, particularly in the classes where we focus on some of these touchy issues that everyone is entitled to their opinion whether they like it or not and that you will respect everyone’s opinion, and I’ve never had kids who had um had great arguments in class, great discussions, but I’ve never had kids who even if they didn’t agree, didn’t at least have an open mind to discuss the alternate point of view but I mean we are still called “conservative,
Caucasian…” so yeah, that’s the way it is but I don’t know... I tell the kids any topic is open in here, we can discuss anything.

M: Now is that something you say the first day of school or is it something you have to continually have to say or what is that like, when you tell them this is open, you must respect each other blah blah blah…

P. Um, I’d say like the first week of school we talk a lot about the rules an atmosphere of the class and from then on most of the projects deal with that and I really don’t have to bring it up again and I’ve never really had issues with that. I think my kids pretty much know that the way I present stuff to them, what I say is what I mean and I very rarely have kids who try to buck the system and they find out very quickly if they don’t abide by the rules of respect they will get knocked down very quickly. So it really has not been a, I mean you have it occasionally but um…mean and that you’re gonna stand by that, how do you think that they know that, like what do you do to enforce that? What kind of stuff…

P: Um. That whenever we have a discussion, I avoid taking a side but at the same time I’m avoiding taking a side, I will also play off of both sides, where I will bring up arguments on this where you know, ok where here is a way you could view it even if you don’t agree with it, but here’s a way you could view it if you do and just I talk a lot about my own travels and my own experiences um, just myself having an open mind and especially when something gets brought to my attention that I don’t realize I’m the first one to say you know, I grew today because you guys taught me this, you know, or I experienced this this weekend, something I’ve never experienced before, and you know showing them I’m still willing to be open and that you know, uh,

M: When you say that students know what you..

M: Admit mistakes maybe?

P: Yeah I definitely admit mistakes, I don’t know. One of my kids mentioned it was my energy, which I don’t know exactly what that means but they just don’t fight me because there’s a level of respect I show them and I’m just lucky enough they show it to me in return. I never yell at the kids, I don’t think that is, well, once a couple years ago, I yelled at a kid who threw something; otherwise I rarely ever raise my voice. We always talk through and discuss issues as opposed to going to an argumentative place. Um, I don’t know.

M: So unless it’s something like it's dangerous or harming?

P: Yeah.

M: Um. What kind of discussions have you had with your students? Maybe have any of them come to you one on one about things?
P: Um I have a girl that I still talk to outside of school. She’s graduated now for a couple of years. Um, I have a lot of kids who come into my room and take, and I’ve kind of stepped back from this but, um, like she was I’m trying to think… I guess she was dealing with like, with sexual identity issues and she wanted to start um, she felt very ostracized at our school and um, and so she started a group, because we do have a fairly large group of um, of gay, lesbian, bisexual students and um, they really felt like they weren’t accepted and so they would come into my room and said they wanted talk to me to start this whole program called pride and they you know, talked you know, to the principal about being allowed, the school psychologist was involved in it. The parents of the kids actually shut it down, the parents of the kids said no. they would still um come up and hang out you know, during lunch on their free periods because they always felt that my room was somewhere where they could just be and you know, they could talk about what they wanted to talk about, they could I guess have support from one another, they would have support from me, I’ve had students who have really difficult home life um either from abuse, parents, divorce, things like that. Kids just always have just come up to me and talk about things they need to and we need to get special people involved. A couple years back, I think it was 3 years ago, I, kids who wanted to commit suicide kept coming to me, I had one girl who slit her wrists in the bathroom and came to me and um, they knew, I guess they knew I was just somebody who would you know, I don’t know, get them help or something like that, somebody that they felt good enough to talk to me. But I have to admit from that point on I kinda stepped back from the kids, I didn’t want that kind of, you know, I kinda freaked out a little bit. I didn’t really know how to handle all of it, because I had like I think 8 or 9 that year that we ended up sending to the institutions to get some help. But that’s why we talk about these issues in class because it’s relevant I’ve seen it in their population, I think it needs to be discussed instead of closing the door and hiding like it doesn’t exist which happens quite a bit around here.

M: Do you think it’s something that students want to talk about but nobody has talked to them about it?

P: I do. Um I think it does depend on the atmosphere in the class, but for the most part, it has um the issues we discuss I try to make relevant as I know the kids, um, issues that will speak directly to them, so the issues do change depending on the class I’m in, but we’ve always had really great discussions, usually to the point where I just entirely stop talking and they just carry on with the conversation and discuss back and forth about how they feel about things. And then usually at the end they will actually turn to me and they will ask me what my opinion is, which I don’t usually give them my opinion. I tell them that, you know, my opinion for them is just too strong.

M: So, hmm. I think we’ll end that now since it’s the end of the class anyway but this is some good stuff, really awesome stuff I think other teachers need to hear so there will be more. Sounds good.
Transcribed Interview #2

M: Ok what issues are relevant to your students?

P: Um what do they think are relevant to them or what do I think are relevant to them?

M: I think kinda both, if you know what I’m saying.

P: Um, issues that they think are relevant to them um are um very egocentric because of the school’s demographic they are very ….very quick and fitting in in particular and I guess my um my idea of the ideals they need to investigate is they need to start breaking down the way they think the way they do, the way they act the way they do, absorb the messages presented by their friends, by their environment, um so that they are empowered and informed consumers of their identity as opposed to simply passive consumers of their identity. So um there is quite a bit of drug use, alcohol use, suicide issues you know that the kids wash over because all of the adults around them tell them that it’s just acceptable to just ignore it, therefore it’s not there. I think they need to confront the choices that they make and the choices presented to them. So we deal with all kinds of issues and we talk about religion to abortion to teen pregnancy. Really, any topic.

M: And you said yesterday that it might change according to the dynamics of the classroom?

P: Definitely it does. I mean we’ll still talk about um I’ll present the same types of issues to the students but the direction that the kids take it tend to be, like for example, my photo II class, they are a very innocent group, they are very young they are only sophomores, most of them have very active parents, so they’re outlook on things is not nearly as jaded as some of the other kids who have had broken families and abuse in their homes and stuff like that. So while we talk about it in that class, the issues that they find more important become more world issues and societal issues, and environmental issues, whereas the kids in the class that come from the broken families the issues of identity become really big. The issues of acceptance you know based on their identity, uh, things I guess in those classes seem to be more personal to the kids, yeah, introverted for the kids. Where the kids who seem to come from the “nuclear families” tend to think outside themselves to more global issues.

M: Ok, would you consider your school a safe environment for you students? And if so, why?

P: Um, I think my school would see itself as a safe environment for the kids, because they are very conservative, they make sure that kids don’t think too much outside what they’re taught and not encouraged, personally, I don’t think that’s a safe environment to be raising kids in because eventually they will have to go out into the real world and deal with real issues and if they haven’t been confronted with those and taught to interact with those issues, they are gonna be lost in that and so they are gonna be making potentially bad decisions or consumed by it or
overwhelmed by it, so the school would say on their conservative view what they are doing is right but personally think that kids need to be pushed further with their thinking

M: Ok, um, so where did you see the education on socially transformative curriculum?

P: Um I don’t think I did, I don’t know where, the I don’t know, it’s always been a part of who I am, mostly I guess I would have to say my own family. Um the encouragement to travel um meet different, um types of people, um, my own experiences in art school, uh, my mentor teacher was fabulous in wanting to push kids to think outside the box, so I was given when I first started teaching a safe haven to be able to do that. I wasn’t expected to, she gave me carte blanche and let me do whatever I wanted to do so, you know, that was a good thing.

M: Ok, when did you start using and incorporating socially transformative curriculum in your classroom, in your different subjects that you teach?

P: It was probably in my second year of teaching. I thought I was doing it my first year of teaching but by the time I got to the end of the year and looked back at what projects my kids were doing I realized that you know in my trying to work through my first year of teaching things were not deep enough, I felt the kids hadn’t gleaned enough, we hadn’t talked enough about issues, and things became much more conceptual based and issues based after that. Which could be a little bit of a problem because the kids don’t necessarily which is something we were talking about in my photo class, the kids don’t necessarily want to keep the projects that aren’t pretty where they don’t just take a picture of a flower, you know, where they actually have to deal with and defend an issue, so I do try to balance sometimes with um, I guess it’s more traditional art like with their final portfolio they have five pictures that have to revolve around a theme or an issue, and then five of the pictures of whatever they want so I let them try to balance out because, they being kids, they still do just wanna have a pretty picture.

M: So you kinda meet them halfway?

P: Yeah, sometimes, a majority maybe 75-85% are issue based projects though dealing around a specific theme each project does.

M: Ok, alright and I guess you kinda answered this already so it maybe a repetition of what you already said which is ok, but why did you start using and including this curriculum

P: I just feel the kids need to be able to interact with their society with an intelligent knowledgeable and responsible level. And it just I don’t know it just is to, I guess I do put forth some of my own agenda but you know I believe in open minded thinking, I can’t imagine not wanting to experience everything possible so I want my kids to have that same kind of view and passion about life not just view life, but be engaged in life. To experience life, but in order to do that you have to be an intelligent person who can you know I guess take account of the situation you are in and make your decision based on that.
M: So you need to be taught how to think through those things….Ok, so what kind of lessons do you teach then?

P: Um, we do… let’s see, uh we do deconstruction of visual culture, we do, um, issues around identity, which includes everything from um gender to sexual identity to um personal identity to society’s expectations where they have to create the perfect human and they have to deconstruct the perfect human and what is wrong with that um. We do uh, projects on political agendas, on xenophobia, um, we do projects on parody where they have to find a way to humorously look at important issues that exist in the world, I mean issues, I know I keep using that word, but issues are all, they really gear it toward themselves. I give them like, usually like a Power Point, where we, I present them with a series of different issues but I really want them to personalize it and take the issue that they feel strongly about. I don’t dictate what they are necessarily dealing with as far as content. Um I’m trying to think of what else…environmental, political, um, we talk a lot about agenda and bias and voice, and um, and that’s all I can think of right now.

M: Ok, so a follow up question would be, students pick things they are interested in, what if it’s the same kinda thing for every project? Do you find that acceptable or do you feel that you need to push them further? What do you do in that situation?

P: If they choose to do the same issue on every project then they have to find a completely different avenue to approach that issue with, it’s not allowed to be the same, it can’t be the same context of the issue, it has to be presented and attacked in a completely different way and for a completely different reason, um, a lot of times I will try to encourage them to, um, for every project that they come up with they have to do ten, they have to brainstorm ideas and so we can always go back and for each project they have to do that so we can always go back to previous projects and take a look at that list and what issues are more important to you? Why are they important to you? Why is this relevant, um.

M: So basically they are always being challenged?

P: Yes. So they aren’t just allowed to pick whatever they want, there is a lot of research, a lot of analysis and a lot of I guess they have to prove that the issue they picked is something strong enough that they feel strongly enough to do it with. They have to turn in proposals to me to show that they’ve really thought through what they are doing.

M: Ok, let’s see here. Did you have any obstacles incorporated into your art classroom with teachers, students, admin, or the community?

P: No, I haven’t yet. The biggest thing would be kids, I have a lot of kids who come in here thinking that art should just be fluff, that they should just be able to do what they want and they have a really hard time with the concept that they actually have to think and that art doesn’t just manifest itself.
M: Ok, um…has your curriculum had to change since you started using lessons for social change or anything?

P: Um, no because I got to help write the curriculum so my mentor teacher was here when we wrote the curriculum so we were really allowed to um we put as much content and concept into the curriculum as humanly possible. So anybody that came in, they were really gonna I guess were really gonna get railroaded into making sure that their project had content and not just fluff.

M: Great! Has anyone lauded your approach to art education here?

P: Lauded it?

M: Like celebrate, congratulate, talked good about it?

P: Not really, no. we’re very much kinda honestly ignored. There’s a big push right now with the core subjects and um pushing mapping and common assessment and things like that so, um, we’re really ignored, so what’s going on right now is I’m trying to align, we’re working at aligning kindergarten through 12th grade to make ourselves more significant…[inaudible]

M: You receive and support with your curriculum?

P: Uh the support that we’ve been getting has just started as of April. When I started petitioning…helping to force the hand to allow us to do certain things. At this point I don’t know where that’s going to take us as far as giving us days to meet as an entire district so that we can talk about it and we’ve been allotted three days next year to meet as a district to help align and strengthen our program. So, but at this point I don’t know where that’s gonna go. But we’re getting more support than we ever had in the past

M: And last question: what sort of advice would you give someone that wants start using this approach that maybe hasn’t in the past?

P: To ensure that they allow their students to maintain their own voice and when you’re dealing with issues like this it’s very easy for personal bias to float in and it’s very easy for personal agenda to be put in so I guess while you want to be passionate and excited about it, at the same time making sure that you don’t overshadow your students and that their needs are being met and their issues being addressed and really not being afraid, not being afraid to push the students. The students I think are smarter and savvier than they ever have been in the past and that they are capable of dealing with issues and I think they feel I think they feel empowered when they are given the opportunity to. When their given the respect, I think they can handle the responsibility like that.

M: Well, since class is starting we will follow up later. Thank you.

P: Thank you that sounds good.
Transcribed Interview #3

M: Ok um take me through your first week of school. What do you tell your kids? How do you tell them your rules, your expectations, consequences, that kind of stuff?

P: Um I have I guess a little dialogue I give them, it’s not really set up or anything like that. I tell them the only thing in this class or the biggest thing in this class is respect regardless of someone’s opinion, regardless of the art you see, respect is paramount, and that’s what I expect from you but I don’t care if you dislike somebody when you walk in this room and you see they’re in this class, in this class you are their friend, they are someone you will have a discussion with. And lay down the law, I’ve never had any issues with kids. This year there were two kids who particularly hated each other in class and they specifically fought outside my class because they knew they weren’t allowed to fight in my class and so they got in a fight outside and they both came down and apologized to me because they did it right after my class and apologized for fighting after my class but they didn’t want to get me in trouble for fighting in class so. I think they do listen to the rules, they talk to each other in class and but apparently they hate each other out of class, well I don’t know, it just works.

M: Very cool.

P: Yeah I don’t know

M: Do you do any Power Points or anything of

P: I hand out a syllabus, but no, I don’t. I just no day one I am very strict as, you know, as far as the way the course runs it’s a very open class but if you cross the bounds I will.

M: What kind of consequences do you have?

P: For behavior?

M: Uh huh

P: Um, I think in seven years I’ve only had to, we have what is called a behavior referral form, where we “brf” kids to the office and in seven years I’ve only had to “brf” two kids I’ve never really had to use punishments in class. If I did, it would be an individual consultation with me um to discuss what the issue is um probably call to the parents, talk it over with the parents see if something is going on, um, I guess they probably have to clean something, I don’t know, it’s never been an issue.

M: Ok cool. Alright, uh. So how do you make this room a safe place mentally and physically?

P: Um, I am very open with my kids that everybody has different opinions and I after they’ve shared their opinions, I cautiously share mine so that it doesn’t influence them too much but I tell them that they are allowed to discuss anything that they want and I bring up a lot of different
issues so that they know they don’t have to be afraid of discussing anything. The kids know they can come and talk to me. Usually they feel confident enough to just say it in front of the entire class. I’ve had a couple kids who come after class pull me aside to talk to me about something and um everything is really laid back so the kids know that they have carte blanche to really discuss what they need to do. I guess it’s just what I set up from day one.

M: Yeah, ok um, going back to the first interview that we had, where you mentioned that you learn your students and you adjust your lessons according to how you learn your students…how do you actually learn your students? What do you actually do to figure them out?

P: The first couple projects usually revolve around identity and cultural expectations where they’re exploring their own point of view so I get a lot off of the first one or two projects that we do.

M: Ok

P: Where they discuss their own work, um, they propose to me what it’s about, why it’s about that, how the medium relates to that and then they have to present in front of the class so that the kids get to know each other as well and um that’s where a lot of my learning comes from. Um I talk to the kids a lot because of the open dialogue um I have no interest in the teachers who come in or come and tell me oh you’ve got this kid in your class you better be careful. I don’t really get any of my information that way um

M: And why is that?

P: Because the kids that they usually say are problems are not and I think it’s just the way they go about dealing with them like problem children because they aren’t really problems, they just need a different avenue to express themselves so

M: Ok, um, ok going to the project you just did, how would you expand this project to make it more dynamic?

P: Um I want to get more visuals in there, more contemporary visual images that they relate to, um, I would like to incorporate especially in the art history class, an entire art history Power Point component where we discuss very in depth in that class how visual images impact, I mean we do it, but it’s on a really basic level for time contraints and things like that but I would like to develop a two week part where we study the baroque period we also just study for two weeks visual culture um and have lots of movies and lots of interactive pieces for the kids to discuss.

M: Ok, um, how do you get your students to push the envelope?

P: Um, I think it helps that they have to discuss with me individually each of their projects because then they don’t get the well they do sometimes kind of I guess stop at a certain point because they believe it’s done they have to in the beginning propose they have to brainstorm then
they have to propose then they have to discuss with their peers and come up with a list of materials and concepts they are doing and then they have to bring it to me and defend why that piece is relevant and contemporary and purposeful, and then I usually play devil’s advocate and shoot ideas back at them and then um from there then I tell them to go back, rethink what they wanted to do and then they have to bring it to me again with a revised proposal and usually from then they are able to start.

M: Ok, so it’s a lot of the planning process?

P: Mmhmm a lot of planning

M: So what if the student plans it and then kinda flakes out on the actual project? What do you do then?

P: Umm usually I try and stay on them to keep working on the project um they end up losing the project grade if they don’t do it. Um, I mean which happens, what usually happens with the kids that usually don’t plan on taking the class don’t end up passing the class anyhow they lose the project grade and then they lose the presentation grade and then they lose the critique grade so it kinda snowballs and they know that from day one that every project, I have my grades set up so that every project is relevant. You skip a project and it’s going to affect your grade. So um…

M: Ok, I just remember um seeing one of the girls, she never finished her project?

P: She brought it in today

M: She did?

P: Yeah

M: Would I be able to see it?

P Yeah, I think it’s actually sitting right there. That was her dog cage and that was all the pieces around it. Now she’ll lose points because it’s not completely finished but she brought it in today.

M: What did you think about it?

P: I think it’s pretty weak I think her not being in class and having no input from the peers and from me that it’s definitely not at a standard it should be at and you know, the grade will be reflected accordingly based on the rubric. Yeah she, a lot of the kids are very smart in that they only want a C or a D and they work it out to know how to just maintain that and she’s one of those kids right across the board

M: It seemed like that from her attitude…

P: Yeah she’s more interested in a lot of social things than anything else so, real nice kid though
M: Uh huh well of course

P: You know it is what it is, that’s very common

M: Right, it is high school after all

P: Yeah and it’s a mentality that’s encouraged here and this whole school atmosphere is to just do enough to get by and be mediocre and so a lot of the kids kind of cop to that

M: So I guess that’s kind of a bit of a challenge then, that you have a whole school atmosphere that’s different from your room and I guess that’s why I question so much, how do you get them to go further? You know what I mean? If they are just so used to doing the bare minimum...

P: Honestly, a lot of their projects are not what I think they ought to be they are not at a level I think they ought to be, I do think I get more out of kids than what I see turned in in the other classes but I still don’t think they are reaching their potential, usually I am fairly disappointed in the visual outcome, they just don’t put forth the work and they hit a point and they just stop they decide they are just done um I always have kids in here after school, before school, during lunch who are allowed to work anytime they want, I give them individual instruction if they want help but um I think sometimes there is only so much you can do. There’s also a big mentality here that art is not important if they are gonna be pulled out, they will be pulled out of this class so, I mean, and the kids also know that at well, you’ll hear that come out um

M: I’ve heard that as well

P: Yeah I think the kids respect for me helps them push themselves a little bit further um the atmosphere in the class, I’m really more interested in the discussions they have and the issues they discuss rather than the art project I mean I want a nice product but at the same time 99% of them are not going to go on to be artists so if they get the skills for thinking, problem solving, conceptual thought, to me that is a successful project

M: Ok cool. What is the most satisfying part of this lesson? Of this kind of teaching?

P: Talking to the kids when they start having open dialogue when I get to sit in class and they are working on their projects and they are actually discussing the issues they are doing and they are arguing with one another about why their point of view is, you know, is valid and then you know, someone else has a different point of view and then someone over at another table gets in on the discussion that’s probably my favorite, just being able to listen to them I guess stand up for their own ideas and develop their own ideas and then I love critique days when the kids share. A lot of times it gets kind of personal for them

M: Is there anything that is not satisfying about this kind of lesson, about this kind of work?

P: Um, the product sometimes would be um I’d say the battle with students sometimes to get them to do something isn’t all that satisfying
M: How does this lesson differ, in regards to that, their satisfaction—your satisfaction, in regards, opposite other lessons you’ve done, different kinds of lessons

P: This one probably because of lack of time, they didn’t get time to execute it the way they should have been able to, um, other projects, I did this in another class, this same project and their products were really good but they also had a month to work on it so those were quite different, it was also um photography II so the kids are at a higher level class, this class is like freshmen, the first class they take in art so many of them take art history as well because they have no interest in studio they don’t want to work in the medium because they might get dirty or its too much effort.

M: Is there any population for whom you wouldn’t find this project appropriate?

P: No, I mean, if it was mostly an African American population I would change it for that demographic, Beverly Hills, same thing, I would make it relate to my students.

M: Isn’t that a lot of work?

P: Yes. But it’s got to be relevant to kids or they don’t care. I care about the kids and I want to reach them. Um it might be over four hours of editing….but it’s what one is supposed to do as a teacher. Also, the um administration doesn’t like the individual consultations because they want teachers to monitor the entire class all of the time. This has been on my review that it takes away from the rest of the class where five minutes of individual help is more than 20 minutes of overall monitoring or something.

M: How would you change this project if you didn’t have the technology that is available to you?

P: Um, I would print off posters, have books, show DVD’s, slides, slide projector, find a way to show them by bringing them closer together to see, go to museums if we were allowed to…due to the demographic and no money, we might not.

M: Pretty much what we art teachers did before smart boards?

P: Yeah.

M: Who do you think got the most out of this project?

P: Um, the suicide group because they were dealing with this issue. The religious group, I had three of them for a year. They want to believe and have faith and are looking for insight. The tree girl, um I had her for a year, she’s quiet and a quiet leader when she’s with her friends. Most of her other projects reflect diseases so I think she’s dealing with that in some way. The one kid with the plaster cast hands, this is now his favorite class. He put in a lot of effort. I told him no whining was allowed and when he said he was busy working, I said, “I’ll tell ya busy.”
M: Yes, you are one busy person. Um, what advice would you give teachers that are afraid to give up control for dialogue?

P: Um. Well, you’re only preaching your ideas; that’s the job of the teacher- to get them to think and develop. The quote that seems appropriate is, “outta the mouths of babes.” Children haven’t been totally jaded yet, don’t be afraid of the kids, get over it. A lot of it is the energy you project- much like the dog whisperer.

M: What advice would you give teachers that are afraid to approach controversial issues?

P: We are a society of great change and conflict and the only way through this is to discuss and if we don’t teach kids to talk and discourse- whether we agree or disagree, we will continue to hate and fear. We don’t live in a bubble.

M: Indeed. Ok and what advice would you say to teachers that say it’s not their job to approach controversial issues?

P: Then I would ask, ‘why did you become an educator?’ It is our job to prepare students for life and if they don’t have exposure, they won’t be prepared. Otherwise, you are pushing your own agenda. You can always bring in a newspaper and talk to the kids about it.

M: So true. So what would you say to administration that say you are stirring up trouble?

P: In the past, I come in super prepared with data and statistics, articles on relevancy and a surplus of information on why it is important. Um so, give me data; prove to me that the students don’t need to talk about real life. Administration doesn’t like confronting me.

M: Yeah, I could imagine. Um so what are some reflections you have of this lesson?

P: Um I would definitely give them more time. A majority of the kids like what they are doing. It does bug me that a majority of them go to the dark side. I want them to be more fun so I need to change the approach to find a way to make it more fun. It’s a work in progress, though; I need to iron out the kinks. It’s um a part of my action research. The identity project is really good now that I’ve tweaked it.

M: Nice. Well I think that’s all I have here. Thank you very much for your time and for sharing.

P: You’re welcome.
APPENDIX C

Images of Sculptural Artworks Used in Abby’s Curriculum

*Frozen Assets* by Michael Farley (2008): plastic water bottles were suspended in an arc from a fountain to give the impression of the bottles being frozen in mid-air so that people can reflect on the amount of waste bottled water produces.


*LIVE*: Green concept made of biodegradable materials and forming them into the typography LIVE to motivate and inspire the audience.

*Building Wave* by Christopher Fennell made from recycled wood material


Global Warming Awareness sand art India: drawing from a tradition of sand art that began there in the 14th century.

*Ice Bear Project* (2009) by Mark Coreth: Ice sculpture surrounding a bronze skeleton that melts exposing the skeleton armature. This promotes global warming awareness.

Midway- Message from the Gyre (2009) by Chris Jordan- Photographs of decaying bird carcasses that show objects they consumed rather than food, commenting on society’s mass consumption and waste

Gyre (2009) by Chris Jordan- Visual of ocean waves- contains 2.4 million pieces of plastic equal to the amount of pounds of plastic pollution going into the earth’s oceans each hour. All plastic was collected from the Pacific Ocean.

Shark Teeth (2009) by Chris Jordan- Picture of sharks depicting 270,000 fossilized shark teeth which is equal to the estimated number of sharks of all species killed each day for fins

Cat and Dog Collars (2009) by Chris Jordan- Image of cartoon characters Charlie Brown and Snoopy made with 10,000 cat and dog collars which is equal to the number of cat and dogs euthanized each day because they do not have a home.

Light Bulbs (2008) by Chris Jordan- Depicts 320,000 light bulbs equal to the number of kilowatt hours of electricity wasted in the United States each minute from inefficient residential usage

Plastic Cups (2008) by Chris Jordan- One million plastic cups is equal to the amount used on airline flights in the United States every six hours.

Barbie Dolls (2008) by Chris Jordan- Design using 32,000 Barbie dolls which is equal to the number of elective breast augmentation surgeries performed monthly in the United States in 2006.

Skull with Cigarette (2007) by Chris Jordan-Based on a Van Gogh painting, this image was created with 200,000 packs of cigarettes which is equal to the number of Americans that die from cigarette smoking every six months
Prison Uniforms (2007) by Chris Jordan- 2.3 million folded prison uniforms that represent the number of incarcerated Americans in 2005. The United States has the largest prison population in the world.

Cans Seurat (2007) by Chris Jordan- 106,000 aluminum cans were used to create an image based on the 1884 Seurat painting, “A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte.” The number of cans illustrates the amount of cans used in the United States every 30 seconds.

Paper Cups (2008) by Chris Jordan- 410,000 paper cups equal to the number of disposable paper hot beverage cups used in the United States every 15 minutes.


Ben Franklin (2007) by Chris Jordan- 125,000 $100.00 bills ($12.5 million) illustrating the amount of money the United States government spends every hour on the war in Iraq.

Constitution (2008) by Chris Jordan- a visual representation of the United States Constitution made of 83,000 Abu Ghraib prisoner photos equal to the number of people arrested and held at United States run detention facilities with no trial or other due process of law during the Bush Administration’s War on Terror.
REFERENCES


