ONE TEACHER'S SEARCH FOR MEANING IN THE CLASSROOM

A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

This Masters thesis follows the life long search of one art educator to uncover the heart and soul of art. Childhood experiences, educational choices, and classroom teaching experiences are examined to explain the evolution of a teaching philosophy. The circumstances and real life experiences are presented in a narrative style.

The works of Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe, and Sydney Walker are highlighted as influential theories in this particular approach to the Big Idea. The progression of the Big Idea from academic study, to personal application, and finally into a high school classroom is documented through artwork and writing.
Dedicated to my family and friends who have allowed me to be a part of their stories and have graciously been a part of mine.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of my advisor, Dr. Michael Parsons. Without his probing questions and challenging classes I would never had started down this path. I would also like to thank him for letting me venture into unfamiliar territory and trusting I could complete a seemingly impossible task.

I would also like to thank Dr. Sydney Walker for sharing her ideas with the world. Without them I may have never considered myself an artist and I surely would not have brought the Big Idea into my classroom in such a meaningful way.

I cannot say ‘thank you’ enough to my sister, Kristen Menke, who helped me buckle down and tighten up this document. She truly is a master editor.

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It's the stories that grab their attention, whether you're a teacher or a journalist. Never forget this. Tell a story and you've got their attention, tell your own story and you've got them hypnotized. Get them to tell their stories, and you've made friends for life.

-Anonymous
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I was about five minutes into an explanation of my thesis when Dr. Chapman interrupted, “If you haven’t thought about the diversity issues, you have wasted your time and your money.” as the thunder and lightening crashed outside. (Yes, this was the Famous Dr. Laura Chapman that wrote the books you probably have used in your classroom.) It was pouring outside now as my tears began to match the volume of the storm.

My mind reeled, “I cannot believe she said that to me, especially in front of ten of my peers. I didn’t think that she was the type of teacher who would be so mean.”

And then, from the right I hear “This would never work in my district. My students don’t think in terms of their own identity, their ethnic tradition prohibits individual identity. All they think about is their role in the community,” this final blow was delivered to me by an assistant-superintendent from the remote northwest United States.
You have to understand, I am not used to being attacked from all sides. And this was just a portion of the disdain they lavished on me. I am usually the one in class that has good ideas, that challenges others to go to the next level, that asks good questions, not the one everyone hopes will just shut up. I thought that I had a good idea. I had, in the course of about five minutes, just been cut down by one of the field’s most well respected teacher/author/researchers and a superintendent that has been in the teaching world longer than I have been alive. All I could think was, “What am I doing? This is never going to work.”

Barely able to control my sobbing, I ran to the bathroom in order to escape my classmates and my fears. What was I going to do? I have been collecting information for eight years, I have about a month to finish putting it all together, and these experts are telling me that it’s garbage. If I don’t finish this now it might not be timely and I might not have the energy or time to do it later.

I went back into the classroom after my little bathroom break and I tried to listen, to participate, but my mind wouldn’t stop spinning in circles. How is what I am doing valid? I know it is valid, I have seen what happens with my own eyes. But how do you know that it would work for everyone? I don’t know. I only know that it worked for my students and me. There has to be a grain of something that every teacher can take out of what I have learned. But what if other teachers can’t find anything useful? I felt sick. My mind just wouldn’t stop bringing up all of my shortcomings and fears about my ability to teach and the weakness of my idea.
I left after about 15 more minutes of mental self-abuse. I went home. I just couldn’t stop crying. I was experiencing the destruction of my precious idea, one of my most treasured things. I had hoped to share it, to help other teachers get to the core of meaning making. My highest hopes of changing the shape of art education, or at least offering up something valuable to the field had been all but destroyed.

On my way home I started to think. I teach an ethnically, religiously, socially diverse group of students. I teach students from many religions: Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Witches, Satanists, Jews, and Buddhists, that I know of. I teach students from all over the world. Students who were born in the United States, in Iran, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Egypt, Korea, China, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Germany and Canada. I have students that live in million dollar mansions and students who share a two-bedroom apartment with their entire family. My district is very diverse.

Many of my students are sons and daughters of entrepreneurs from around the world. I haven’t ever had objections from any parents or students about the content or structure of my classes. If there were conflicts with their religion or culture, they never said anything, never wrote anything, that indicated they were having a problem or felt uncomfortable.

My classmates and teacher didn’t give me a chance to think and respond to their objections. I felt their objections and questions about my idea were unfounded. I believed they did not have the whole story. I only had the chance to explain my meaning making
process for five minutes before they started asking questions. I am sure the picture they had was far from accurate. It is going to take this entire thesis to explain my process of meaning making properly.

By the time I got home I was feeling much better. The drive home gave me an opportunity to reflect on the importance of my experiences. I knew I had something important, something meaningful, to share with the art education community. I also knew from the exchange in class that I needed to be very careful about how I told my story and explained my Big Idea process.

Sitting in the class for another full day was the last thing that I wanted to do. I debated whether I would go back. I really didn’t want to face any of my classmates or my teacher. However, my fears about ruining my grade and jeopardizing my chance to graduate this summer prevailed over the potential discomfort I might feel being in that class again. Despite my reservations I went for the last day of class.

I walked into the room and Dr. Chapman said, “Kate, can I talk to you outside for a minute?” By this time I actually felt worse for her, knowing that if she was any kind of reasonable teacher, she must have felt terrible to have a student leave her class in tears like I did. “Sure.” I said and I put my stuff down and we headed out into the hallway.

“I have something that I wrote for you last night. I tried to call but there was no answer at your number.” Dr. Chapman said.
“I know, I turned off my phone, I really had some soul searching to do last night and I didn’t want anything to interrupt my thinking.” I replied.

By this time it was obvious to me that Dr. Chapman was visibly upset about the situation. She had tears in her eyes. “I just want you to know I am truly sorry about what happened yesterday. It was so apt, the thunder and lightening crashing in the background. I saw you put your head down and I thought you were just thinking. When you looked up I realized you were upset and by then it was too late. I am so sorry that the whole discussion got so out of control.”

I smiled, trying to reassure her I really was okay. I was now feeling awful for making her so upset. “It was really bad yesterday but I needed it. The experience made me realize how important it is I tell my story right. I really am okay.”

She gave me a hug, and the letter she had written, and we headed back into the classroom. I managed to make it through the entire day without anything else happening. My contributions to the class that morning were much more guarded but I did manage to participate.

Later on that day, Dr. Chapman gave us all books from her reading list. She gave me a book on scholarly personal narratives. I had told her I wanted to write in a way that touched my readers but I was concerned it wouldn’t be academic enough to satisfy my
school's requirements. Whether she intended it or not, I saw her gesture as permission, from one of the foremost art education experts, to pursue a non-traditional approach to examine my understandings. The book she gave me, *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*, allowed me to redirect my approach to writing my thesis.

I read the book in less than a day. I swear, if I didn't know better I would have thought it was written just for me. This book gave me everything I needed write the way I felt I had to. It explained how the Scholarly Personal Narrative originated; it's strengths and weaknesses, the process of writing, and the ethical dilemmas accompanying this type of scholarly writing.

The author, Robert Nash, is a professor in the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont. He wrote the book because of his personal experiences as part of the academic institution and his subsequent experiences advising students over 35 years. It was written to fill a post-modern gap in research methodology.

“Scholarly personal narrative is the unabashed, up-front admissions that "your own life signifies," ...your own life has meaning, both for you and for others. Your own life tells a story (or a series of stories) that, when narrated well, can deliver to your readers those delicious aha! moments of self and social insight that are all too rare in more conventional forms of research.” (Nash 24)
I had a vision of a thesis that could be read by an exhausted teacher at the end of a long day. Nash insists personal scholarly narratives are necessary because they can provide a bridge between the world of academia and practice. This is exactly what I wanted to do; I wanted to write about my experiences so others would want to read about them. So many times in my education I would read this long article, full of jargon and big words, wading through the writing to get at the meat of the research. I wanted to write something that would touch my readers and be research based. My experiences were personal and I couldn’t bear the idea of removing myself to making my research impersonal.

I believe this story is important. I believe some teacher out there is struggling with the same things I was struggling with before I found the Big Idea. I know what I have to say can help teachers find a way to incorporate this process into their teaching. I am sure students will be positively impacted in both their learning and their personal development.

I am totally invested in this process. When Nash affirmed this feeling — by saying anyone who does research is personally invested in the process and the findings — I was overjoyed. Nash approach to SPN offers the researcher the opportunity to put any bias front and center. The philosophy is simply; don’t try to remove the bias, put it on display for all to see. My bias is that this research is my passion, it is my way of examining my world and it has changed my life, I cherish it.
I could not talk about something so important without using my voice. When I tried, it came out flat, and I felt there was no place for intuitive understandings in the research.

The voice of the researcher becomes an integral part of the writing style of an SPN so there is no attempt to make the research impersonal. While some traditional academics might rail against this, SPN allows the researcher to be present in their research. It is based on the post-modern premise that we all construct our own truths; there isn’t one exclusive all encompassing truth. Personal narratives allow the reader to learn from the author’s life.

Nash provides tentative guidelines for writing SPN, although he states they are not set in stone and can be adapted as needed. First and foremost, writing is a craft and it is the responsibility of the researcher to write well. Equally important is the necessity to tell a story in an interesting, clear, eloquent way. It is not an easy task to write well, tell an interesting story, and simultaneously put your strengths and weaknesses on display.

The story should simultaneously reference the researcher’s life and be applicable in a more general way to anyone’s life experience. In the writing there should be an attempt to move from the specific to the general and back. Focusing on specific details from the author/researcher’s life is important to flesh out the message of the narrative.

In a SPN, it is okay to cite and quote other scholarly writing and simultaneously draw on your own personal knowledge and experiences in your field. These techniques will
further add to the meaning and application of the narrative. It is okay to be passionate about what you are writing and include it alongside the scholarly quotes.

When writing a SPN, Nash reminds us that it is important to understand our stories are wrapped up in the stories of others. We need to be responsible in the telling of our stories so we do as little harm as possible while telling the story in a truthful manner. My students, even the ones who drive me crazy, have a special place in my heart. I include their words and their works in a way I hope does them justice.

How to best get at doing the story justice is a continual process. Nash says,

"...SPN students are in the process of continually learning how best to share their most cherished meanings with others in mutually respectful, written exchanges."

(26)

There are many writing styles similar to a SPN, including a memoir, autobiography, or essay. The difference primarily lies in the focus of the writing. In a SPN the writer uses their personality to investigate things outside themselves, whereas a memoir would use subject matter to investigate their personality. Autobiographies have a more chronological structure with a focus on history and episodes of a person’s life. Essays and memoirs tend to frame a life in terms of people, events and incidents. A SPN can have the qualities of one or all of these other forms of writing but, additionally, “intentionally organize their essays around themes, issues, constructs, and concepts that carry larger, more universalizeable meanings for readers.” (Nash 30)
These universal meanings must come out of an understanding of the author’s truth. “Personal narrative writing is “true” when writers work hard to make personal meaning of their day-to-day experiences in a way that readers believe it.” (Nash 27) A truthful manner might mean it is necessary to condense information or change circumstances slightly in order to tell the story in a more concise way. The altering of the story is not intended to deceive but to present the information in a more useable informative manner.

“Stories can be true or false based on a variety of criteria: aesthetic, psychological, theological, political, philosophical, scientific, personal experience, and so forth. What makes a story true for all people in all times and places is not simply whether it can stand the test of scientific experiment, or whether it can make valid predictions that can be empirically tested.” (Nash 33)

While I believe it is important for the reader to understand the researcher’s truth, I also feel it is necessary for the researcher to be truthful. However much Nash might imply that fictionalizing an account can be useful, I believe it is more important to tell what really happened. I also believe it is even more important to tell accurate truth if it does not support everything the researcher believes to be true. Truth forces the researcher to look at their findings and ask important questions about why the findings are not truely supportive.

Some forms of truth are better respected and understood in academia. Generally, this tradition in academia needs to be respected. In order to do SPN work it is usually
important to work within the established methodologies first and challenge them slowly. Pushing the definitions of things to the very edge within accepted methods is one way to go about enacting change. SPN writers need to remember that structures and methodologies are in existence to ensure academic rigor is maintained. It is out of self-preservation that professional institutions may raise questions about this methodology.

I encountered only minimal resistance when approaching my advisor about doing a SPN. I believe it was because I was constantly talking about how personal my research was to me. Dr. Parson's, my advisor, initially told me it was acceptable to be informal but I didn't need to go quite as far as writing a narrative. I wasn't sure, so I kept reading. I was determined to find a methodology I was comfortable telling my story with.

As with any SPN, when all is said and done, it is up to you, the reader of my work, to decide if my ideas and experiences are valid. It is my hope that you can find at least a shred of something that will make your teaching and your students learning more meaningful.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

You already know that my students are diverse. In contrast, I appear to be, on the outside, as normal as can be. I am 32 years old and have been teaching for the past seven years. Before that, I went to school to be a graphic designer and spent some quality time doing design work. However, if you were to ask, I would say I have only been an artist for three years.

It sounds strange but it is true. Before coming into contact with the Big Idea I had never been able to make art on my own. I had the desire but I didn’t have a clue where to start. This was something that I knew about myself from a very young age.

I grew up in an affluent suburb near Columbus, Ohio. My school district valued the arts enough to provide each school with art teachers and rooms in which to make art. Mrs. B was my elementary school art teacher; She was wonderful, fun, energetic, and challenging. She made connections between the subjects and gave us a new way to
understand different aspects of our world. I remember that I enjoyed and looked forward to art every week because I couldn’t wait to see what we were going to do next.

In elementary school, I was never considered the class artist. I didn’t doodle on the edges of my papers, at least not more than any of my classmates did. I never copied cartoon characters. I had no private art lessons. As a very young child I even had a hard time coloring in coloring books because I hated to ruin the perfect pictures.

Despite all of these things, I have always been better than average in the visual arts. Occasionally, I had artwork put in the display cases at school. Mrs. B even selected one of my pieces for a show. If the assignment was to make a mask I made a nice mask. If we were to draw a line drawing of a building, I drew a neat line drawing of a building. I was always better than okay at art exercises, things that were designed to develop our artistic skills and hand eye coordination. I remember getting great satisfaction from doing these types of projects well.

As an elementary school student, I believed that an artist was someone who was very skilled, infinitely wise — maybe even a genius, hard working, and plugged into some special power that others didn’t have. Artists were mystical, special, better than the rest of us. Artists could communicate things that ordinary people felt intensely. They were able to capture the essence of a thing.
What I would consider a decisive moment in my artistic career happened in sixth grade. We were given a linoleum block and were supposed to come up with a simple line drawing. I had no idea what to make for that linoleum print, my best friend at the time came up with a beautiful drawing of a flower.

There was great pressure to come up with an idea quickly. I was uneasy about this project from the time Mrs. B. started to explain the dangerous tools we would be using. When I tried to think of something to make I knew that I was doing something wrong. A little voice inside my head told me that a true artist would know what to make with a linoleum block. Much to my dismay, I was stumped.

So, I drew a picture of an elephant and a pool of water. The elephant was spraying water from its trunk. To put it mildly, the image was really bad. It came from my imagination and was completely meaningless to me. It was something created in order to complete the project.

It was the first time I remember thinking that I was lacking some quality that was necessary to be a true artist. I liked making art well enough, I had skills that were above average, but there was something that I didn’t have and it had something to do with that pathetic elephant.

Fast-forward about ten years. I entered college at Bowling Green State University to study interior design. I didn’t know what I was doing there. I really didn’t have a passion
for what I was doing. It seemed I was okay at it. I could always procrastinate and get a
decent grade.

I just remember thinking I was a total fraud and someone was going to find out. I was
missing that feeling in the pit of my stomach that said I was doing something important
and meaningful. There was no passion behind what I was doing and worse even less
drive. I enjoyed trying to solve the problems we were given, but that was it, but I never
felt anything more. I solved the problems to get them done, meet the requirements, and
hopefully get a good grade. Again, it seemed that I had a little different motivation than
most of my fellow students.

Then I transferred to Ohio State to study visual communications. I thought the visual
problems presented were much more interesting than the problems we were given in
interior design. Once again, I enjoyed solving the problems and really enjoyed going
through the design process, but I was generally uninspired.

Many of my fellow students lived and breathed art. They spent hours reading magazines
and books and studying theories and perfecting techniques. I was afraid of them. They
were very different from me, motivated by a different force.

Don’t get me wrong, I wanted desperately to be like them. I wanted to think about design
all of the time, I wanted to excel at the projects, and I wanted to feel passionate about it. I
just couldn’t find the enthusiasm within myself necessary to be so driven.
After receiving my BSID from Ohio State, I worked for a short time as a graphic designer. Spending twelve hours a day behind a computer left me feeling empty. There was very little positive human interaction at this time and I temporarily misplaced my passion for the creative process. I didn’t stay long. I was uninspired by the work and I got drained very quickly. The decision to leave the field wasn’t difficult, despite strong protests from my parents.

I decided to go back to school to become an art educator. It was my hope that I would be able to make a positive impact on the world, continue learning for the rest of my life, and earn enough money to live a comfortable life.
CHAPTER 3

MY INTRODUCTION TO ART EDUCATION

THEORY

In 1998, I was just beginning my studies in art education. One of my instructors gave an assignment to develop a personal teaching philosophy based on all of the reading from our classes. At that point I had not been into a classroom and was just becoming familiar with writing and theory in the field of art education. I wrote,

"I believe that art is one of the few subjects that all students have the potential to excel. It is the teacher's job to seek out and find those subjects that interest each student and allow him or her to express those interests in a variety of ways. Art in the classroom presents a unique opportunity for the teacher to allow students to explore their individuality through their artistic expression. Art is a subject where finding a right solution may mean each student creates a different solution based on their life experiences and perceptions."
This belief has not changed for me. I still believe art is a unique subject where students should be given as much freedom as possible to peruse their individual interests and create unique artistic solutions. This may have been a little bit of foreshadowing in my teaching career. Ever since then I have been trying to create a classroom that offers those types of opportunities to every student.

At the time the popular art education movement was Discipline Based Art Education. At Ohio State we completed all of out research and lesson development in order to cover all aspects of this educational approach. Even back then, before I got into a classroom I was feeling DBAE was not a perfect fit for me. In the same paper I wrote,

“The concept of Discipline Based Art Education, the idea that a student should be taught to be an artist and produce art like one, to be a critic and interpret the work of art, to be an art historian and understand the context affecting an artist, and to understand aesthetics is an effective way of learning art is excellent if it is combined with some form of child centered approach. “

I really felt like the child was being left out of art education. Where was the time for play? Where was voice of the student artist in all of this? I also was questioning what students would take with them from the art classroom besides art related skills. It is apparent there was a budding constructivist within me, just waiting to get out when I wrote in this same paper, “The process of educating students should also include teaching them skills they can use in the world after they move beyond the classroom.”
Another requirement for the paper about our teaching philosophy included using a metaphor.

"I feel I am most closely aligned with the journey metaphor. Student learning is a journey, therefore, I believe that it will be my job as a teacher to highlight main points, offer ideas, and present new perspectives but it is up to the student to decide which route they will take to understanding. The metaphor of a journey in the classroom means, to me, it is important to provide opportunities for free expression and student led inquiry or "journeys". Also, I believe as a teacher I should call into question the notion of an absolute right and a wrong way or "path" of doing something and allow students to develop their own sense of "direction" or values."

I am amazed something I wrote seven years ago could so completely describe my approach to teaching. I must have valued this version of education long before I got into teaching for it to still resonate for me today.

Later on in the same class, our instructor gave us the assignment to define critical thinking. One part of this writing really sticks out,

"... the last part of my concept of critical thinking, which is accepting that there are, or may be, other ways of seeing an idea or concept. Realizing there is no way to acquire every possible perspective and thought about an idea or concept is probably the most important part of being a critical thinker. Being able to adjust
an idea or concept that a person has developed over time shows agility and
flexibility, with acknowledging one’s own physical limitation. In this way a person
opens up to the world, allowing different ideas and perspective to permeate their
lives and enrich their experiences and also becomes a critical thinker of the
highest order. “

I was raised in a household where there was always a concrete right or wrong answer to
anything. Growing up there was no grey area in my life. When I was in middle school I
got to the hospital, where my father worked, to follow him around for a day. He and his
partner were doing a research procedure on a newborn pig.

The poor pig was deformed and would have been killed shortly after it was born. Instead,
the farmer sold his malformed pigs to the hospital for research. The pigs would be put
under, so they didn’t feel anything, and at the end of the procedure would be put to sleep
painless.

This particular procedure went smoothly except at the very end. My father and the other
doctor were looking for the heart. They had a heartbeat but they couldn’t get an image of
it on the ultrasound. They kept looking on the left hand side saying to each other, “It
should be here. This is really strange.”

I was just a kid so I wasn’t going to say anything, but I kept thinking to myself, “Why
don’t you look on the other side?” but they never did. Sure enough, when they went to do
an autopsy to find out what happened during the procedure, the heart was on the right side instead of the left.

It was the first time I realized my dad wasn’t always right. It was also the first time I realized sometimes the wrong answer is actually right. This one incident was so powerful it shaped my concept of critical thinking.

After the pig I knew there was value in what I previously thought of as the wrong answer. I knew my father was extremely intelligent, but he couldn’t shift his thinking to allow a different view of reality into his medical world. I understood how important it was, from that point on, not to get stuck in a rut with my thinking.

In art education, one way our instructor checked if we were stuck in a rut with our thinking was to ask, “What is the most important product of an art lesson?” I loved this question at the time. Our instructor could be very sarcastic and it seemed like a trick question to me when I wrote,

“In a few words, the simplest product of an art lesson is a more well-rounded, educated child. If a teacher is following national and state standards or at least attempting to follow some sort of comprehensive arts education curriculum, the students should be learning on many different levels. The product is not just one thing but rather a range of subtle things that allow the student to think, see, and express themselves in new ways.”
I took the question seriously, my focus, even in my first years of the program, was on the student. I wasn't just satisfied with teaching a student art; I wanted to give them something more. Although I didn't know what it was at the time, there was more constructivist attitude creeping into my teaching approach.

"The kind of thought that is produced in the art room — perception, imagination, inventiveness, and creativity — can also be transferred into self-confidence in other classes where self-expression and creativity is required."

I wanted to teach my students and make them better equipped to function in the world. I wanted to use all of the tools at my disposal. I knew it was important to understand both the discipline of art and child development.

"In order to be an effective teacher and make the classroom experience a rewarding one for the students it is important to have a general understanding of child development...it easier for the teacher to teach and assess students and it can make a more enjoyable experience for the students. Ignoring the developmental stages may create a learning environment that is not conducive to learning."

I felt I knew a lot about education when I was done with all of the prerequisite classes. We had covered all of the bases on theory and knew how to put a lesson together. I even
mistakenly believed there wasn’t a nook or cranny I hadn’t examined within myself concerning teaching. I was soon to fine I was wrong.

PRACTICE

As you can see, I was trained to think about the development levels of my students, Bloom’s taxonomy, art history, art studio, aesthetics, art criticism, critical thinking and to develop lengthy 25 page unit plans from my understanding of these things, but nothing could prepare me for the reality of my first year of teaching. I was easily able to create well-rounded lessons and assess student work in reasonably authentic ways but I was not ready for the reality of students as individuals. I learned in dramatic, painful ways students are human and have their own stories worth telling. Learning theory was all well and good but the reality was, there were real people in my classroom and I had to teach them.

There are experiences in my first few years of teaching that really made an impression on me. These events always reminded me that students live messy lives outside the classroom. While I could control what happened in my classroom, to some extent, and protect them from danger when they were in my class, all bets were off when they left.

The first time I realized all of the answers weren’t in theory was when I met a student by the name of Nick. He was a tough character. I got the “Oh, you have him in class, good
luck.” from a lot of my coworkers. I wasn’t ever scared of him but he did challenge my classroom management on a daily basis.

One day he came into my room looking exceptionally rumpled. I realized he was wearing the same clothes he had on the day before. He looked tired and he hadn’t shaved. After getting the class going with the daily activity, I called him over to my desk to talk.

“Nick are you ok?” I asked.

He looked down at the floor and rubbed his head. He looked up at me and said, “Yeah, I am just tired, my dad threw me out of the house last night. I slept in my truck. We had a really bad fight. My step-mom almost called the cops.

At this point my inner dialogue took over and started screaming, “What? How could a parent who is supposed to love their child throw them out into the cold like that? It was winter. He had to be freezing all night.” But my calm, in control teacher voice said, “Is there anything I can do?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think I can go back. I think this is for real. He said he would kill me if I came back,” was his matter of fact reply.

“Does your counselor know?” I asked.
He looked down at the floor again, “I am going to go later and talk to him. I’ll be okay, I’ll figure something out.”

I said, “Nick, I will do whatever I can to help you. Just let me know, okay.” And I let him go back to his seat.

I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know whom I should tell. No one gave me any instruction about this situation when I was at Ohio State. I spent the rest of the day worried about what I should do. He said he was going to talk to his counselor so I figured it was out of my hands. I just continued to worry about him the rest of the night.

Maybe I was tired; maybe I was overwhelmed with my first year of teaching, I don’t know. I got really upset when I went home that night. I had never known anyone who had been kicked out of his or her house before. I grew up in a conservative upscale community; I only had one friend whose parents were even divorced. This was a new reality for me.

I called my mother back home and cried. I had visions of this young man freezing in his truck. I didn’t understand his family’s reaction and I didn’t know what I should do to make the situation better. I cried for hours that night.
The next day I went straight in to school to talk to my principal. I explained the situation to him and told him how upset I was. He said he was very sorry I was so upset but it was over nothing. This happened in Nick's family at least once a month.

I was crushed. All of that energy and emotion I wasted for nothing. Everything was going to be fine. I didn't think so. At least I had to change the way I operated so it didn't happen again.

I wanted to find a way for students to communicate their reality through their artwork. I would never have known about this problem if I hadn't asked. What if I had the type of classroom where students could examine issues they were struggling with in their lives? I knew I couldn't change his life situation but I could maybe offer him a different way to look at his life.

Another incident that changed my teaching happened in my second year of teaching. It was a Wednesday morning, 7:00 am, and I had three students from the Ohio State Art Education program sitting in the art office asking me questions about teaching. There was a knock at the door and in walked a student from the main office.

"Ms. Menke, they need to see you in the main office right now." She said with a worried look on her face.
"Can it wait? I have students here interviewing me, it will only be a couple more minutes till we are finished." I said, perturbed about being interrupted at the beginning of an already hectic day.

"No, I don’t think so. They need you right now."

Shaking my head and apologizing to the O.S.U. students, I got up and followed the student out of the art office. We walked into the main office. My stomach was doing flip-flops. I could think was, "I am going to be fired." I had never been called into the office before; I had only heard stories about being called down to the principal from other teachers.

As we walked through the office, I followed the student past the principal’s office, back to the conference room. To my relief there were a bunch of other teachers already waiting.

I sat down and looked around the room. I knew these teachers from somewhere. I had been in contact with a lot of them recently, I just couldn’t think of what the connection was. I asked, "Does anyone know what is going on?"

Several answers of "no' and "I don’t have any idea." Came from the group.
We sat there making small talk about why we could have been called down at the same
time, before school even started. “It can’t be good,” one of the veteran teachers said.
“They would have told us already if it was good news.”

My stomach started to flutter a little bit again. I looked around and realized there were
several teachers I had emailed the week before about a particular student.

“Do any of you have Angela?” I asked.

Everyone responded with a yes or a nod of the head. “I thought so. Haven’t I emailed
most of you before about her? I bet she’s run away again.” I said, starting to feel a little
better, knowing what this meeting might be about.

About then our principal walked in. She looked strange, a little detached, a little
unnerved, not like her normally composed self.

“I have some sad new to share with all of you this morning, we got a phone call this
morning. Angela committed suicide before school this morning,” she said in a stronger
voice than I could have.

All I could think was, “What hospital is she in? She’s okay. She’s got to be okay. She is
such a strong willed young person.” And then it sunk in. She was dead. She hadn’t
attempted suicide; she had committed suicide. She was successful. Angela was dead.
I had just seen her yesterday. She didn’t stop by my room between classes like normal but that wasn’t any reason for concern. She had been doing better in her classes. She had ended her horrible relationship with her much older boyfriend. Everything was looking up for her. I didn’t understand.

I knew this girl well. She spent several periods a day with me some days. I knew her life story. I called her mother when I thought she would run away, postponing the inevitable for several weeks. I had no idea she was even thinking of this.

I was trained in suicide prevention. I worked on a hotline when I was in high school. I knew all of the signs. When I look back she did exhibit some signs, but she never said anything to me about wanting to die.

I felt like I had let her down. I felt like there had to be something I could have done to make her experience in school and in the world better. I wanted to let her know that she was interesting and had important things to contribute to the world.

This experience was the catalyst that moved me to pursuing a more meaningful way to teach. I never wanted this to happen to again. I wanted to find a way to empower my students so they didn’t feel so hopeless and powerless they had to take their life.
I realized I needed to provide a real way for students to communicate about their realities. I am not talking about using art as therapy, rather, I wanted to give my students a voice to tell their stories. I wanted to empower them to tell the world about what they knew and understood from their experiences.

I now know it wasn’t my fault, there were a lot of other people in her world privy to information that could have stopped Angela from ending her life. I also know it is also unrealistic for me to expect that I can change such extreme intentions. Because of Angela I want to provide a safe place for those students who don’t quite fit the mold. I want them to know their voices will be heard when they are in my class.

Without the theory from O.S.U. and the reality from my first years of teaching, I might never have gone in search of the Big Idea. These stories represent a fraction of what drove me to seek a better way of teaching art. As much as I enjoyed learning about teaching and as much as it hurt to go through the experiences with my students, it gave me resiliency to keep searching for what you are about to read.
CHAPTER 4

MEETING THE BIG IDEA FOR THE FIRST TIME

In DR. Michael Parsons' class we read the book *Understanding By Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. This book was a breakthrough for me. It was the first time I experienced unit and lesson design that focused primarily on students' understanding. This system allows teachers to focus on information that really matters. *Understanding By Design* categorizes different types of learning so teachers can appropriately value and assess student work.

*Understanding By Design* allows space in unit design for state and local curriculum and national and state standards. It gives teachers a way to break down high stakes testing and broad standards into enduring concepts. By empowering the teacher in this way, it can reduce the fear of assessment. After reading the book it is much easier for me to view assessment as proof I am doing my job and the students are doing theirs.
BACKWARD DESIGN

The book and the class started out with a bang. Right from the start we are reframing the process of teaching. “Given a task to be accomplished, how do we get there? Or one might call it planned coaching: What kinds of lessons and practices are needed to master key performances?” (Wiggins and McTighe 9) The concept of backward design has put things into perspective. Instead of thinking, “I want to teach a painting lesson,” and touching on art history, aesthetics, criticism, techniques, and forcing the standards fit at the very end. It puts the focus of the lesson immediately on what the student should know when they are finished.

How can this process be simpler? Step one: identify desired results. What do you want the students know understand and be able to do? Step 2: Determine acceptable evidence. What would serve as evidence of the enduring understanding you’re after? Step 3: Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction. What activities the students will do during the unit and what resources and materials you will need for those activities. It is so streamlined it is hard to believe planning units could be this stress free.

This is the opposite of what I did in student teaching. We were taught to think about standards, but really, the design of the units relied on covering all of the Discipline Based Art Education bases. At the end of a unit there was always a question of whether you were really assessing what you taught or what you think you taught.
I know the concept of designing lessons based on what we want students to know and be able to do was introduced during student teaching. There was just so much to pay attention to I don’t think I fully grasped the potential of the concept. I was too worried about discipline, covering the aspects of DBAE, and turning the proper paperwork into the proper person at the proper time.

My first couple of years of teaching I remember thinking I needed to focus on three things I wanted my students to take out of the class, the unit and the daily lesson. I understood, even back then, students are not going to remember most of what they do in my classroom. I would start the development of my classes with the following thoughts in mind. What are students going to remember? What do students need to remember from my class?

I was just staring to scratch the surface of enduring understandings with those questions. I was thinking in the right direction, but until I read about Big Idea for the first time, I was just wandering around in the dark.

"To what extent does the idea, topic, or process represent a “big idea” having enduring value beyond the classroom? Enduring understandings go beyond discrete facts or skills to focus on larger concepts, principles, or processes."

(Wiggins and Cliché 10)

After I read this, and the rest of the first chapter, I could never look at my teaching and my students’ learning the same way. I was excited to getting beyond facts, tests or standards. Enduring understandings could help students appreciate their world in new
ways. My teaching could no longer be just about making sure students knew who the impressionist artists were, what type of painting they did, why the movement happened, and what it meant to art.

During the first week of class, Dr. Parson’s asked us to think about what kinds of assessment we were currently using. We discussed the kinds of understanding students had to have in order to perform well on different types of assessment. In one class we were able to see how important performance assessment is to uncover true student understanding. Dr. Parsons also made sure we didn’t discount other types of understanding. He made sure we understood they had a place in the structure of a unit. That we knew other types of assessment were essential to uncovering the little skills and understanding students would need to do well on the larger performance assessment and real life applications of their knowledge.

A huge weight felt like it had been lifted from my chest when I learned all of this. I started to look at my classroom in a whole new light. If I know where I want my students to get, I can create a road map for them to get there. There would be no questions about whether I taught them what I wanted them to know. The lessons I would design would teach them exactly what I wanted to assess.

Most of all, I wanted my students to reach an understanding about art.

"Understanding involves the abstract and conceptual, not merely the concrete and discrete: concepts, generalizations, theories, and mental links between facts."
And understanding also involves the ability to use the knowledge and skill in context, as opposed to doing something routine and on cue in out-of-context assignments or assessment items. So when we say we want students to understand the knowledge and skill they have learned, we are not being redundant. We want them to be able to use that knowledge in authentic situations as well as to understand the background of that knowledge.” (Wiggins and McTighe 24)

How exciting would it be a student in a class where this is happening? How exciting would it be to be teacher in this type of situation? I couldn’t wait to try this in my classroom. I started to think about my next lessons and units immediately. This energized me like nothing else in teaching had in a long time.

As we got deeper into the book it seems Wiggins and McTighe really have something important to offer the teaching world. For so long we have taught students to listen and regurgitate. It is so ingrained in a student’s brain that when I pose a question to my class with no obvious answer I hear comments like, “this is too hard,” or “why can’t you just give us the answer?” or “this kind of thinking makes my brain hurt.” It is tragic students don’t have to generate their own ideas more often.

I think back to my high school experience when I would be sitting in my seat, listening to the teacher talk. More often than not, I would have so many questions, I wouldn’t dare ask, but had I asked, could have been really interesting inquiry opportunities.
One of my goals as a teacher is to use my students' natural curiosity more effectively. To help them overcome their reliance on rote learning. The impression I got while reading *Understanding by Design* is the learning process can be more like a journey with wonderful discoveries just waiting to happen. We, as teachers, can be like tour guides who know the points of interest along the way. We know where our ultimate destination is but we should allow students the opportunity to use a map for a little sightseeing of their own along the way.

With all of this new-found understanding, I think it would have been a successful quarter if I hadn't even gotten past the second chapter of the book and the second week of class. All of a sudden my job seemed easy. I knew exactly what I had to do lead my students toward understanding. I started to think about using essential questions in my classroom.

I started to ask questions of myself. What makes a good work of art? Why is art important? What is Graphics? How does the ability to make multiples affect a work of art? How do artists make art? How is visual art different from other types of art? I couldn’t stop thinking in questions. There is one question, “What do artists do?” besides make art, that keeps rolling around in the back of my mind. I think there is a lot to be uncovered from the answer to this essential question.

By the time I got halfway through *Understanding By Design*, I was already using parts of it in my classroom. Even though I was still working out how to exactly apply it, I started to ask a lot more open-ended questions to get at enduring understandings. Before the
Class I had been okay at questioning strategies, after the class questions were a breeze to generate.

Wiggins and McTighe are my educational heroes. They are really trying to make the job of teaching more manageable. With their book they have given teachers some powerful tools designed to use in a classroom. They even break down student understanding. We don’t have to figure out where a student is or should be in Bloom’s taxonomy.

"The six facets of understanding...provide helpful direction as we develop a blueprint for uncoverage...to ensure meaningful understanding of what is studied.
Facet 1, explanation, students have the opportunity to build test and verify theories or explanations. Facet 2, interpretation, students have opportunities to build their own interpretations, translations, and narratives from primary source texts, events and experiences. Facet 3, application, students have opportunities to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real or realistic situations. Facet 4, perspective, students have opportunities to take multiple points of view on the same issue. Facet 5, empathy, students are confronted with types of direct experience designed to develop greater openness and empathy for experiences and worldviews other than their own. Facet 6, self-knowledge, requires students both to engage in ongoing self-assessment about what they know and how they know it and to make their thinking explicit." (Wiggins and McTighe 105-106)
When Dr. Parsons asked us to design a unit of instruction, using the methods we learned in class, I decided I would rewrite my entire curriculum for my class. I started with a list of essential questions, based on the requirements of the curriculum. After I generated a long list, I arranged them into Big Idea clusters, ideas that naturally connected and made sense together. Once I had all that work done, it was easy to identify what students needed to know and be able to do, and what enduring understanding they needed. I wrote my rubrics and then roughed out what materials and artists would support what I wanted them to know and be able to do. From there, the details of my lessons and units just fell into place.

Acknowledging this was the way I really wanted to teach was easy for me. When I came to a list that contrasted Didactic and Constructivist teaching approaches I had a major paradigm shift. For the first time I understood I was a constructivist teacher. It was a list of qualities. Just looking at the list made me happy. I didn’t have to use the DBAE approach any more. There was a name for the way I wanted to teach and techniques developed to allow me to do it. This was the first time I felt like my teaching style would be in harmony with my beliefs about learning.

This class gave me all of the tools to allow my students to uncover knowledge. For the first time in my teaching career I felt like I really understood assessment and the proper way to use it. There was no more need for me to be the expert on the pulpit.
I cannot state enough what a revelation this experience was. The concepts of backward
design and the big idea made my teaching richer because I could focus on what is
important and keep the trivia minimal. In my lessons I now place more emphasis on the
enduring understandings, the things students can take from my class to make sense of the
world and of their future experiences.
CHAPTER 5

THE MEANING MAKING CLASS

Earlier this year, Dr. Parsons put forth a rhetorical question, “Why don’t we ask students to do what artist do? We teach students to write like different types of writers, to think like scientists and make hypotheses, and to act like mathematicians and prove theorems, why don’t we have them do what artists do?” This question has plagued me for the last six months so I signed up for Dr. Sydney Walker’s class to see if I could discover the answer.

What do artists do? They make art. But what does that really mean? I don’t know. I want so badly to be an artist but I don’t know how to do it. It’s why I went into design; I couldn’t make art on my own. I could come up with artistic solutions to design problems but I couldn’t generate my own art. Art is deeper than reproducing reality.

Artists filter their world through their eyes and hands and make creations. How do they know what to say? How do they know what to make? How do they know anyone will
care enough to look? If I can’t figure out how to do what an artist does, how am I supposed to help my students become artists or even understand what artists do?

DR. WALKER’S CLASS

In Sydney Walker’s book, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*, she uses professional artists as models for making meaningful artwork and to dissect the meaning making process to be used in an art classroom. Her approach utilizes DBAE as a foundation for the Big Idea to develop a more interdisciplinary approach for art instruction.

There is a section in the book that lists questions Dr. Walker had about what artists do. She asked the same questions I had been thinking about for years but just didn’t know where to find the answers. From these questions she created exercises and provided background information for contemporary artists throughout the book.

Walker’s Big Idea is very different from Wiggins and McTighe’s in *Understanding By Design*. I understand their way of approaching the Big Idea but Walker’s explanation has me very lost.

“Subject matter is the artist topic, whereas big ideas are the artists concepts.” (3)

I thought Big Ideas were cross-disciplinary and represented enduring understandings. I know this book is trying to adapt the Big Idea to the field of art but it is not as clear to me as Wiggins and McTighe. How do we know what the artist’s Big Idea is? I don’t know of
any artist who started with a Big Idea and went on to make a body of work. I have never heard an artist talk about their art making in terms of a Big Idea. Does this mean teachers have to determine what the artist’s Big Idea is? Do teachers have the knowledge, and more importantly, right to do this?

Dr. Walker gave us a worksheet to help us think about our project. At the top it said,

"take an object, do something to it, do something else," Jasper Johns

Contemporary artists don’t know about the big idea. It is an artificial construct of the educational system. The construct of the Big Idea can be very helpful to teachers but we should be wary of doing a disservice to our students We should not present the Big Idea as the WAY that artists think. They don’t. Jasper Johns was explaining his process, which may or may not be his Big Idea, depending on your reading of his artwork. He speaks of transformation, which is one of Walker’s identified Big Ideas but I am not convinced her would call it his Big Idea if he were asked.

Based on everything I know from my years of studying art, an artist works and works and works and eventually something grabs him or her. Only after the artist spends much time searching do they discover what it is they will focus their life’s work on. It might end up being particular subject matter or it might be an idea (their Big Idea?). The meaning comes out of their repeated art making. The more the artist makes, the more obvious the meaning becomes.
Therefore, a viewer cannot determine a Big Idea by looking at one piece of an artist work. It is essential to look at many works by the same artist in order to understand the driving force behind their art making over time. Dr. Walker talks about this just briefly, so briefly that I thought she had missed this part of the process.

"Artists generally experiment with several directions before settling on a big idea that will sustain their attention over an extended period... Personal interest plays a significant role in directing the artist's choice of ideas. Becoming personally connected to the big idea is highly important for art making; otherwise art making can become merely an exercise in problem solving." (2)

While I agree wholeheartedly with most of this quote, the last part of this quote is bothersome to me. It seems she is saying exercises in problem solving are less worthy of the title art. I know artists sometimes just go through exercises. There is a German artist, Gerhard Richter, who very clearly went through a series of problem solving exercises necessary for him to make the next conceptual jump in his art. He was making art to keep moving forward.

Students need to know even professional artists take time to practice and problem solve. Intense meaning making has got to be challenging and it is hard to believe it happens with every piece of art made by every artist. An artist may make several rough drafts before settling on the final version of a work of art. If we, as teachers, ignore this part of
the meaning making process we risk perpetuating the myth that artists get their inspiration from a higher power.

The first two paragraphs of Teaching Meaning in Artmaking include a reference to what happens to students in meaning making process.

"Students too need opportunities to learn about an idea, build an adequate knowledge base for working with it, examine the idea in the work of other artists, and find personal connections to the big idea." (2)

According to Dr. Walker, students must first have enough time to get through all of these stages. As anyone who teaches knows, students come to understandings of things at very different rates. Some students come to my classroom with a lot of artistic skill, some with a strong inner voice, some with merely a desire for an easy A. I see my students 50 minutes every day for 18 weeks; which is not a lot of time. How can I get them to do, in a semester, what an artist sometimes takes more than ten years to do?

Moreover, most artists go to college to study art. They are exposed to art history and contemporary artists in the course of their studies. These future artists develop their skills beyond their already discovered talent in the arts. Artists have lots of educational time to let these experiences percolate and condense into deep understandings. My students don’t have four years, they have 18 weeks. Also, they are older and have more real life experience from which to draw their inspiration.
But is this higher-level approach asking too much of individuals who are barely into their teen years? Do they have enough knowledge of the world to communicate anything of meaning? Assuming they do, how can I get my students to fast-forward through the phases of becoming an artist? What do I need to provide so they can make meaningful artwork reflecting their understanding of the world?

Dr. Walker suggests that teachers need to set boundaries for students in order for them to make meaningful artwork.

*An understanding of boundary setting is critical for designing art instruction that engages students with meaning, rather than simply the production of products. Two or three purposeful requirements for a project are more effective than a lengthy list of them; unlimited options fail to offer the resistance needed for creation.*

*Boundaries set necessary limits that enable artists to work productively.* (73)

She goes on to give a little more explanation,

*"We must ask: What ideas are students to explore" How can media, style, and formal boundaries serve the expression and exploration of these ideas? By setting aesthetic boundaries, we do not predetermine all the decisions for students; rather, we provide a framework for their own decisions.* (74)
In order to create appropriate boundaries for our students we need to know what they are trying to investigate. It is our job as educators to choose appropriate media for their message and create further limits so students can convey their ideas more easily. I am not sure how to design a unit only knowing what students want to learn about. It seems like this would lead to a lot of last minute adjustments and lesson plan writing. I wonder how this is going to play out in my own art making for her class.

**DISCOVERING MY ARTIST WITHIN**

Dr. Walker gave us the Big Project assignment. We are finally going to learn how to think like an artist. I already know that change is going to be my Big Idea. My entire life is in turmoil right now. Everything is in turmoil. I have broken up with my boyfriend of 6 years, I am moving out of our apartment and back into my parents’ house. I am struggling with change on a moment-to-moment basis.

When I think about making art about change, my first concern is about communicating effectively with my audience. As a graphic designer I was trained to develop systems, to create visual clues and symbols that make art easier to understand. Because of my training I feel the need to create a visual symbol system. Having my own vocabulary allows my audience to learn my language and be able to access my work more easily. Creating artwork will then be less stressful for me if I have a vocabulary with which to speak.
I’ve never known what to do or what to make. I knew artists had stories to tell, things to get off their minds. The idea of change to me was so scary before. Now I see change is just process and sometimes a very positive thing.

Right now I am living with my parents, which would normally be a very undesirable situation, but it has provided an opportunity to connect with my family in a way that I have not in many years. For the first time in my life I went to a concert by myself. I would have never done this before. Not only is examining my life allowing me to make art, it is allowing me to try new things in my life.

I have many questions about this idea of change as it relates to my life including:
What makes change good or bad? How do I/we control change? Manipulate it?
What happens when we resist change? Welcome it? What is the evidence of change?
What do I want to investigate about this idea? How have I changed? How has the change affected me? Has change been good for me?

All of the sudden I have ideas for my art. I have something I want to say, something that I care to share with the world. I want to talk about how my life has changed. In one month it is completely different. I got brave and I took a step. It didn’t kill me. Now I am happy and excited about my future. I don’t know if my art is successful, but I like the ideas I am putting into it. I would like to use the idea of transformation but I am not sure how. I also need to make all of the dissimilar pieces I have planned work together, to relate to one another as a solid series. What is the work I saying about me?
My initial thought is that I will investigate my changes through the environment. My surroundings are constantly changing this quarter. I have moved from a sweet little double in Grandview Heights to a subdivision in Westerville. In a month I will move to a condo in Westerville all within three months. I don’t have a clue where my life’s stuff is right now.

There are images that have been flooding my consciousness since the Big Project was given. Of particular interest to me are eggs and chickens. I am a woman and much tension and anguish in my life right now revolves around whether or not I will be a mother. Pressure to take on that role caused a lot of tension in my past relationship.

I would like to represent the concept of motherhood through eggs. Eggs are fragile and can be broken very easily. They offer some protection for whatever is inside them. A broken egg could be very powerful. The living things born from eggs are interesting, chickens, birds, snakes, platypus, and alligators.

Because I have this new obsession with eggs it is only natural to think about the animal from which they come. Birds with wings or without wings may be images I can use to communicate the idea of freedom. In my life I struggle with freedom, finding it, losing it, noticing change brings all of that with any decision I make.
Images associated with metamorphosis also draw me even closer to the Big Idea of change. The visuals of larvae, pupa, and adult are powerful and I wonder if I can use them in my artwork. I want to investigate my experience, to examine the daily changes and their affects over time.

The church I attended when I was young used the symbol of a butterfly. It was everywhere, the program, on t-shirts, banners, and lapel pins. It was used to describe our transformation in faith. While I am no longer part of the church I consider this image one that left an indelible impression on my psyche.

The butterfly effect also brings the image of the butterfly and my personal touch together. Supposedly the insignificant motion of the flapping of a butterfly's wings here on earth affects every molecule in the universe. That idea is powerful to me.

A year ago I went to New York City to visit an artist friend. We were in Greenwich Village and decided to stop in and see a psychic. She read our palms. She said no matter what I choose, to follow my dreams or go a more conventional route, I would end up in the same place at the end of my journey. So I began to think about the possibility of seeing the future in the lines of my hand.

I am intrigued with the idea of photocopying my palms and making silk-screens of them. I would love to do an enlargement of my palm as a map and label the lines. The idea of something so intimate, so personal being looked at in a new way at a new scale is
exciting to me. Even making multiples handprints and silk-screening them on things to represent the way my touch, my fate affects the world.

Speaking of fate, something happened last night, if I was a cartoon character a light bulb would have appeared above my head. As part of Dr. Walker’s project we are allowed to incorporate past artwork into our series so I was going through a lot of stuff from long time ago to see if there was anything useable. One picture had a profound affect on me. As I saw it for the first time in almost two years I felt like a Mac truck ran over me.

This was the only piece of artwork I ever created because I needed to. I created it when one of my students committed suicide. I had painted white wings on my student and the background was pthathlo blue. These are the same images I had been using in my current artwork to tie it all together. I completely forgot I had used them in her painting. I used the wings to symbolize her freedom and I painted the background blue to communicate the absence of anger she felt so strongly while she was alive.

I think this is something that happens to a lot of artists. They choose create artwork about things they are interested in and they use images because they are personally meaningful. The last time my life changed as drastically as it is now was the morning I found out about my students suicide. My teaching and my relationships with my students would never be the same after that. The color blue and the image of wings had been hiding in my unconscious; just waiting to reemerge when I finally had something important to communicate.
On the last night I am going to work on this project for class, change is still enveloping
me, still welcoming me with open arms. I am moving in 8 days to a condo with my
parents. It will be my second move in just over a month. I think I will probably stay with
my parents for another couple of months because I can’t bear the thought of moving
again.

If I had to characterize my life right now it would be in a bag. I have been living out of a
backpack. I have been living in my room from when I was in high school but treating it
like a hotel room, not like I live there. Living like this makes me want to let go of things,
reduce the weight of my life and my stuff.

As far as this class is concerned I have not had enough time to develop everything I need
to or want to. I have about 9 works of art that have come together but I have so many
other ideas I didn't get to. I am going to try to talk about them later.

I feel like I did a ton of work and blossomed as an artist during this quarter but I also
seriously question whether I did what Dr. Walker wanted. I know I didn’t generate a lot
of research or background information about the two artists I selected but I didn’t feel
that I needed to research any more. I know enough about so many artists and their work it
wasn’t necessary. I didn’t want to spend the time on their work; I wanted to spend it on
mine.
There is so much more for me to know and investigate. I have so many ideas about these works I don’t even know where to start. Right now I am afraid... I don’t think I need to ask any more questions of myself. I just need to make some artwork.

MY CLASSROOM

I have been searching for a way to create meaningful artwork for so long. My love and enthusiasm for art always helped to maintain my students’ interest level during class but I wanted each of my kids to discover the love of art for themselves. I wanted my kids to uncover the value of art and why it can be such a powerful way to communicate. I didn’t want them to be convinced by my ranting and raving.

For my classroom, I was yearning for a technique that would provide a process of discovery and passion for my students. Personally, I had been searching for a better understanding of why and how artists make art. These two things converged in Dr. Walker’s class. It changed the way I think about art and the way I feel art should be taught.

All along there was a little voice inside my head that increasingly questioned what I was taught in school and what I was practicing in my classroom. At the time at Ohio State we lived, breathed, and slept with the DBAE philosophy. I believed if I was using it as my
framework for teaching I was at least moving in the right direction. I didn’t understand why I always felt like the expert on the soapbox. Constructing lessons always felt formulaic and I was always concerned that I might be teaching incorrectly or leaving out a vital piece of the unit. DBAE just didn’t fit very well with my own chaotic way of organizing the world and making sense of my experiences.

My thoughts have always been unorganized. I tend to make a lot of connections with things that are seemingly unrelated to each other in both my own head and my classroom. I didn’t feel DBAE allowed me to be free to wander, with purpose; through my own thought processes or the thought processes of my students. I couldn’t articulate it very well but I was searching for a much more fluid, dynamic way of asking questions and discovering answers than the DBAE framework provided.

I need to make the Big Idea, Key Concepts, Questions, and Objectives personal for my students. I need to develop a worksheet that functions as a record of their ideas and provides a stepping off point. My young students would probably make the leap from personal to universal relationships with the Big Idea most comfortably. I think they could easily communicate their own experiences and their own points of view about the Big Idea but they may not be able to easily reach beyond to see how the Big Idea affects the wider world.

I know I will be implementing this into my classes next semester but I also need time to break this process down into more manageable parts for high school learners. I have not
yet started to think about a specific unit I would like to create. I haven’t had time. Instead I wanted to think about changing the way I approach teaching entirely.

Next semester I am going to have my students do projects with Big Ideas. They will choose one to work with for the entire semester. My students will follow an adapted version of the process I went through this quarter to create my artwork. Hopefully, in the end, they will generate ideas or artwork they feel passionate about.

The steps I will take to make this happen in each of my classes:

1. Identify a big idea they would like to work with.
2. Create a list of questions they have about this big idea.
3. Look at an artist or artists that use their big idea. Identify what questions they might be trying to answer...Identify the symbols and language the artist uses to investigate the questions.
4. Brainstorm a list of images, colors, words that might go along with the big idea and their perspective on it. Or identify images they are attracted to.
5. Students would create art using colors, images and words associated with this big idea. The media would change from lesson to lesson. The question they are trying to answer remains the same. Students would carry over a part of their symbol system but alter the way it is used based on media considerations.
Dr. Walker wanted us to collect some information about artists who inspired us or used the same Big Idea. I chose Frida Kahlo to research. I have a love-hate relationship with her. Frida and I have a lot of things in common despite our glaringly obvious differences. We both have experience with broken backs, chronic pain, and destructive relationships.

I have always loathed Frida’s narcissistic tendencies. It used to bother me because I felt she was being melodramatic. However, as I get older I understand why she almost exclusively focused on herself, her pain, and the suffering of other women. I struggle with my own pain associated with a spine injury every day. I understand how all consuming the pain can become. I know I was inflicted with a mere fraction of the damage she experienced and I didn’t have to contend with medical techniques from 1900s in Mexico.

Her reality was pain, physical and emotional. Every day the pain in her back was the one thing she could count on. I am sure drugs and alcohol provided a brief escape from the ever-present pain. I do not blame her for seeking refuge from her daily physical suffering.

"In 1925, Kahlo suffered the serious accident which was to set the pattern for much of the rest of her life. She was traveling in a bus which collided with a tramcar, and suffered serious injuries to her right leg and pelvis. The accident made it impossible
for her to have children, though it was to be many years before she accepted this. It also meant that she faced a life-long battle against pain. In 1926, during her convalescence, she painted her first self-portrait, the beginning of a long series in which she charted the events of her life and her emotional reactions to them.”

(Lucie-Smith)

Frida’s famous quote — “I suffered two grave accidents in my life. One in which a streetcar knocked me down... The other accident is Diego” (Lucie-Smith), — could have come from me with only minor adjustments. At the age of fourteen, I was almost crushed by a van and the other accident was my childhood sweetheart. I can sympathize with the torture Frida endured and the damage she caused in her relationship with Diego Rivera. I loved my man, as blindly as she did Diego, and I suffered nearly as much. Just like Frida, those experiences shaped my work.

IN A NUTSHELL

This has been an absolutely amazing experience. I have never made so much art in such a short period of time and the scary thing is I could go on making it forever. It’s pouring out of me. I am just starting to understand the images and symbols within these works. Some may be very obvious ... some not so obvious. I just know this came from somewhere deep inside and it has been there for a long time.

Looking back over this quarter there is so much I learned about asking questions, the
process of making art and myself. I am finally an artist! Making art can be inspirational. Creating a language that can be used to make the artwork is crucial. An artist needs to have some elements and principles, some imagery, and a theme/big idea from which to start.

Art making is an evolutionary process. It doesn’t happen over night. It actually happens in fits and starts ... it is hard to force but once you start it is even harder to stop. Revisiting essential questions is important ... especially if you want to find an answer. Just seeing where the art will take you is a good way of getting your bearings on the journey.
CHAPTER 6

MY ARTWORK

There are three phases of my art making, before the Big Idea, exploring the Big Idea, and after the Big Idea. These three phases span almost fifteen years of my life, but like I said before, I don’t consider anything I made before three years ago to be real art. It has been a long process of learning to trust myself and accept I might have something of interest to share with the world.

In college I made a lot of very mediocre work, for several reasons. I had one semester of art in high school and went straight into studying interior space design. I had almost no experience with any media, I had no art history background, and absolutely no clue what motivated artists to make art.
These paintings of teddy bears were made as a college painting level one class. Our assignment was to paint a still life under two different lighting conditions. I painted both paintings in one day, one in the morning and one at night. The subject matter wasn’t even interesting to me. I just wanted to get the project done.

Figure 6.1 *Teddy Bears I, 1994, Oil on Canvas*
Figure 6.2 *Teddy Bears 2*, 1994, Oil on Canvas
Standing in the Fourth Floor Hallway of Hopkins Hall, looking at all of our paintings, our teacher said, “Of all these paintings, there is only one student who completed the task as I assigned it.” He pointed to my two simple paintings of teddy bears. “These two paintings clearly illustrate the difference between two different types of lighting.” The instructor turns to me, “When did you paint these?”

“I painted one in the morning, with the light from my window and the other at night under a yellow light bulb.” I answered, sheepishly.

I was torn between shame and pride. There were other students whose work was more meaningful and who, I felt, surely took more time on the assignment. I couldn’t think of anything else to paint so I arranged some stuffed animals against the wall of my room and painted them. It wasn’t rocket science. The teacher told us to show the effects of light on our subject matter. I just followed his directions.
As a graphic designer I exclusively created designs for other people. It was rare to have a design that was unaffected by another designer or a client. I made lots of nice looking skillful pieces but I would not call it artwork. This is a brochure that I worked on with another designer for a weight lifting equipment company.
Figure 6.4 *Self-portrait with Cat*, 1998, acrylic on canvas
This project moves into the time I started student teaching. I remember really enjoying painting this picture. I wrote a unit about self-portraits, which required students to represent themselves realistically and symbolically in the form of a color and an object or animal. The paintings were also supposed to be done in the style of a famous artist. As you can see, I painted in the style of VanDogen and included a cat and the color red as symbols of me.

ANGELA

Figure 6.5 Angela, 2001, acrylic and collage on wood panel
I always struggled to believe I had a story worth telling; I never made my own art. I considered my life to be average at best, and boring at worst. A tragedy gave me the fuel to create my first work of art when my student, Angela, committed suicide. I didn’t know what else to do. I didn’t know how to get through the experience. I wanted to do something so that I wouldn’t forget her. This is the first time I used the wings and the blue color in a work of art.

SOMETHING SPECIAL

Figure 6.6 Something Special, 2003, Yarn, papier-mâché, plaster, feathers, monofilament
During Walker's class I made several pieces that were part of a series. My Big Idea was change. I was enthralled with a particular color of blue and obsessed with images of eggs. So I used those two things to tie my works together.

The first object I made was based on a dream I experienced at that time. I dreamt of a glowing sphere. In the dream I had an overwhelming feeling the sphere was something very important but I had no idea what it was. All I knew was I supposed to give it away.

In the morning I woke up, and knew I had to do something with the dream. I went to school and gave a papier-mâché demonstration to my students. I used the imagery from my dream to create an egg-shaped hollow form. I told the story of the dream and explained what I intended to make. I was going to be a closed egg shape with something inside to make it rattle, in the style of Duchamp's With Hidden Noise. I would then wrap it in dyed phthalo blue yarn. My students went nuts. They couldn't stand the idea they wouldn't know what was inside. So, I asked them what I should do. One of my more forward thinking female students said, "You should cut a door into the sphere and put something in it, something that goes with whatever else you are going to make."

Other students agreed and made suggestions as to what should be inside. They had become so invested in the piece I felt obligated to honor their input. I cut a hole in the sphere and put the winged heart inside. I know, it is cheesy, but this was my first attempt at making any kind of art for myself.
By the time I finished *Something Special* I had so many ideas I didn’t have enough time to make all of them. I had to pick and choose the ideas that would best make a series and tell my story. I went online to find quotes about change. The next piece I created was originally intended to be another version of *Something Special* but I wanted to put the heart with wings inside a cage like box. I had images of my ex-boyfriend trapping my heart so that even if I left he would still have a part of me. The more I thought about it the more I disliked the idea.

FREE

Figure 6.7 *Free*, 2003, wooden box, eggshell, marker and acrylic paint
My life at the time was about freedom. I decided to modify my work so it was more about getting out or escaping. I put an empty eggshell inside the box. I colored the box blue so viewers would know it was a part of the series and I decorated the outside of the box with quotes about change.

At the end of four weeks I made ten works of art. Every work had the color blue I love so much, birds, or eggs, and yarn. I was getting comfortable with the opposing ideas of freedom and restriction in my life and how change brought about these conditions.

Since Dr. Walker’s meaning making class I have made a lot of art. Several pieces were gifts for friends, exercises in color and paint application, investigating ceramic techniques, and an assignment for class. At this point in my life I can say that I could make art for eight hours a day for more than a year and still not get all of the ideas out. For every one painting I finish, I have five more I could start working on.

HAND SERIES

The hand series sprung out of the blue series from Walker’s class. I was interested in the idea of palm reading. I couldn’t find any interesting palm reading diagrams so I tried to come up with a substitute. I kept looking at my palm and thinking the lines were really interesting all by themselves. So I started to sketch them. I decided to use the shapes and patterns the lines created to do some abstract paintings.
Figure 6.8 *Hand #5 (Blue Butterfly)*, 2003, acrylic on canvas
Figure 6.9 Hand #6, 2003, acrylic on canvas
Figure 6.10 *Hand #9*, 2004, acrylic on canvas
Figure 6.11 *Hand #10*, 2004, acrylic on canvas
The resulting paintings were studies in color and texture. I was really anxious to start painting. I used the hands as a way of exploring painting techniques and colors mixing. These paintings have turned into a meditative practice for me. I don’t have to think about what I am painting. I can put the color on the canvas in a way that moves me on that particular day.

THREE WOMEN

I took a class in the summer of 2004 about visual culture. The three paintings of women came about as a response to an assignment for that class. I don’t even remember what the assignment was but I remember why I chose to paint these three very specific women. I wanted to examine the roles of women in movies important during different times in my life. I chose Cinderella from my childhood, Trinity from “The Matrix” to represent the time right after college, and Helen from “Sliding Doors”, which I watched during my first years as a teacher. I watched each movie and stopped at certain points to trace the images onto overheads. I then projected the images onto canvas and traced them. I painted each painting with only two complimentary colors, white, and black.
Figure 6.12 *Action Woman*, 2004, acrylic on canvas

Figure 6.13 *Girl Next Door*, 2004, acrylic on canvas

Figure 6.14 *Fairytale Princess*, 2004, acrylic on canvas
CERAMICS

Shortly thereafter, I took a ceramics class in order to get some more experience with the medium. It turned into a very expressive quarter for me. We were given some interesting projects but I had a revelation - I could use my big idea to create meaningful work in a class. I used my Big Idea to make connections between all of the works I created during the semester.

![Image of ceramic sculpture]

Figure 6.15 Egg, Body, Screw, Light, 2004, Low fire ceramics, glazes and acrylic paint
Figure 6.16 Blue Bone, 2004, Low fire ceramics, and acrylic paint

SPINE SERIES

Out of the work in ceramics I was inspired to make paintings about my experience with my back. I painted two pictures about six months apart. I was in a lot of pain when I started the first painting. By the time I got to the second painting I was feeling pain bit it was a lot less.
Figure 6.17
*Spine 1, 2004, acrylic on cardboard*

Figure 6.18
*Spine 2, 2004, acrylic on cardboard*
The preceding painting represents my most recent work. I applied the painting technique I developed in the hand series and applied it to reproduce photographic images. This painting is my first attempt at using my own painting technique to do a somewhat realistic painting. There is no intended meaning behind this work. It is an exploration in technique. The image was selected only because I thought the receiver would enjoy it.
Red Tree was painted, as a gift to a couple that I have become friend with over the past three years. They are gracious hosts and I hoped to thank them for letting me stay in their home by giving them a work of art.

My future artwork is headed in several different directions. I will certainly continue to paint in the VanGoghesque style of my abstract hands and more realistic landscapes. I would like to apply my painting technique to pictured taken from my travels around the country and the world.

I am obsessed with Chuck Close and his gigantic heads. I want to figure out how he paints them and then apply my painting technique to create images of my friends and family. I have started a painting that will be my fist attempt at understanding what Close does with his images. You might be thinking this kind of art making gets away from my big idea a little bit. You may be right, but in my head there is still a connection.

Change in my life has always been possible because of the support from my friends and family. Without them I couldn’t function let alone evolve. Today, change in my life is usually limited to where I travel. So even though it may not be obvious to the casual observer, my Big Idea still shapes my art making today and in the future.
CHAPTER 7

THE BIG IDEA PROCESS IN MY CLASSROOM

Just to make sure that we are all on the same page regarding the Big Ideas, these are two ideas key to this art making process,

...involving an enduring conception or principle that transcends its origins, subject matter, or place in time; and a linchpin idea—one crucial to a student’s ability to understand a subject. (Wiggins and McTighe 113)

...broad important human issues are characterized by complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity. Whether stated as single terms, phrases, or complete statements, big ideas do not completely explicate an idea, but represent a host of concepts that form the idea. (Walker 1)
A typical semester in one of my second-level high school art classes begins with an introduction to the course, the materials, and the Big Idea. Second-level classes, in my district, are broken up according to media. Students can choose between semester courses in graphics, photography, painting, drawing, ceramics, computer graphics, and sculpture. I have used the Big Idea in Graphics, Sculpture, Ceramics, and Computer Graphics.

The first day in one of my classes is easily the most unnerving, for both my students and me. I introduce myself and tell my life story, including the messy and complicated parts. I share my art, including the works from the previous chapter, and tell the stories behind them. I explain what art means to me and why it occupies the place it has in my world. Then I tell the story of the Big Idea, how it came into my life, and why I value it so highly.

Sometimes I worry that I am sharing too much and overwhelming them, but I feel sharing this information sets precedence for openness and honesty. Students are always amazed that I talk about my life on the first day of class. They always end up asking questions about my life and how it relates to the artwork.

The reason I do this is because of an experience from my time in school. I had one teacher in high school I thought was exceptionally intelligent and interesting. Every once in a while she would tell stories about her life outside of school. I always wanted to ask her to tell us more, but felt it wasn’t my place. I always wonder what wisdom I missed by
not hearing more of her personal story. I know there might be one student in the class that would benefit from hearing more from me than just art stuff.

If students survive the first day of class where I put my life on display, the second day of class, I ask students to turn inward and begin to examine themselves. They are introduced to the Big Idea Worksheet, which they revisit every time a new project starts. (The worksheet was developed from my experience in Dr. Walker's class and from her book. I distilled the information from the book that was most helpful to me in going through the process and translated it into a worksheet.) Students are expected to select a Big Idea and complete the worksheet by the end of class (or homework if they need more time).

*Big Idea Worksheet: Choose a big idea from the list. If you have a difficult time selecting one that you like, cross off the ones that you know you do not like. Answer the questions and complete the statements on the worksheet.*

The third day we delve into mind maps and how they can be used to generate ideas. Every student completes a mind map for his or her big idea. If they finish early I ask them to look through magazines and collect reference images that relate to things that are on their mind map. It is almost impossible for most young artists to draw from their mind. It is much easier if they have something they can look at when creating their designs.

*Create a mind web of things that are connected to the big idea. Create as many off shoots as you can. Do not worry about ideas that don't seem to "fit". Write down anything that comes to mind. When you get to the fourth tier start shooting*
off images or objects that relate to your ideas. This will be the foundation for your visual vocabulary and symbols.

The goal of all of this work is to fast-forward the process of making artwork like professional artists. It is my goal for students to investigate a particular train of thought, to develop a recognizable look to their artwork, to understand why their thinking and resulting artwork is important to them, and their relationship to the world.

The first project in Graphics is a photomontage contrasting two sides of their Big Idea. Oftentimes, in the beginning, students will have a very shallow understanding of their idea. This project gets them immersed in the plurality and ambiguity of the Big Idea right from the start. The materials for this first project are inexpensive and generally less technically challenging in order to focus on their ideas. Also, for the first two weeks of class students can change their schedules, so there is a lot of turnover in my classes. The project is designed so that it can be done independently (if they miss a couple of days because of scheduling) and inexpensively, so if students leave, the budget isn’t blown.

Assignment 1: Using your Mind Map and your Big Idea Worksheet to help you generate ideas, create a work of art demonstrating two opposing sides of your Big Idea. Generate at least three possible ideas for the project. When you are finished with your final project, complete the progress report and turn them both in.
The second project the students complete is a research project. This can be done alone or in groups, depending on the situation. There is a list of contemporary artists from which they can choose. The information students’ find about their artists is presented to the class. This project has had several different permeations over the years; students have completed it in the form of a mini-book, a paper, and a Power Point presentation.

*Assignment 2: Choose an artist from the research worksheet. Complete the research project.*

The reason students complete a research project at this point is to reintroduce the process of building artistic meaning. By the end of the project, students will identify their artist’s big idea, look at a large selection of their work, and see how it evolves over their career. After they complete their research they will have seen me go through the process and they will have seen a famous artist. Hopefully that will help them envision how they can use this process to their own creative advantage.

After students have gotten their feet wet with the Big Idea, I break down the artistic process into little parts. I use a method of combining the imagery and ideas generated from the Big Idea Worksheet and the Mind Map with the elements and principles of art. Students are able to choose a subject matter from their Mind Map, a question to comment on from the Big Idea Worksheet, select elements and principles that work to support their commentary. This helps them get closer to the goal of creating a meaningful work of art.
Assignment three it is their first opportunity to make an original work of art with all of the resources they have generated.

Assignment 3: Using your Mind Map and your Big Idea Worksheet to help you select ideas and images, create a work of art demonstrating how the big idea affects your life. When you are finished complete the progress report for the project.

Assignment 4, 5, 6, etc: Using your Mind Map and your Big Idea Worksheet to help you generate ideas, create a work of art communicating what you know about how the big idea affects your group of friends or family, your town, your country, or the world. Please make sure you include yourself within the project somehow. “Where are you in this picture?”

When you are finished complete the progress report for the project.

Every time students complete a project they revisit their writing from the first day of class. They are allowed to add to or change anything they have written. It allows them to revisit their ideas and see where they have been and where they want to go with their thoughts. At the end of each project there are two assessment pieces they must complete. They must complete a progress report on which they draw out their ideas and explain their thought process and how it has evolved. They must also complete a rubric designed specifically to assess the skills and requirements for each project.
At the very end of the class students are asked to present their works in a progress portfolio review. If they keep track of their progress reports, Big Idea Worksheet, sketchbook and Mind Map they will be able to track their thought process for the entire semester. They can start looking for patterns in their thinking and creating. Through this process of examination it becomes obvious they have something unique to say about their experiences and perspectives.

This process has evolved over about three years into a simple, flexible system that allows students the freedom to follow their own thought processes. I utilize it in my second-level classes and above. Some semesters I have chosen one Big Idea for the entire class to use. Recently, I have been more inclined to allow students to select a Big Idea of their choice.

Both approaches work equally well. The difference is in the kind of dialogue that goes on and the universal questions that are asked by the class as a whole. The choice should be determined by your district curriculum, your goals for the class, the class personality (if you have a hint of what it could be beforehand), interdisciplinary interests, community issues, and the needs of the student body as a whole.

My means of limiting the artistic process: (For each project I choose one or more of the following)

- Curriculum and Standards requirements
- Materials, Processes and Techniques
- Depth of Field (do you want students to examine their personal experience or the world experience with their Big Idea?)
- Elements and Principles of Art
Transformation, disruption, and concealment, illogical combination, opposition (from Sidney Walker's book) or other strategies to explore the Big Idea.
Use a symbol, imagery, color scheme, style, and technique from the previous project in the current project.

I see the unit design process like a mathematical problem in my own head. You can take out or add any of the above variables as your needs dictate. Generally, my process looks something like the following diagram.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 7.1 the unit-making problem
In my experience it is important to keep switching the depth of field for every project. Students might start out the quarter with a shallow depth of field, examining their personal experience with the Big Idea, almost like a self-portrait. The next project would be like an Ansel Adams landscape photograph. The student would be in the picture but the focus would be more on the relationship between the Big Idea and the student’s immediate surroundings or culture. The last project would be like a picture taken from space. The student would be in there somewhere, but the focus would be on the relationship between the world and the Big Idea.

_I always ask my students,_

“**What do you know about your Big Idea and ...?**”

“**What do you want to say about your Big Idea and ...?**”

“**What bothers you about your Big Idea and ...?**”

“**Where are you in the picture/work?**” (or how does this relate to you?)

“**How does the Big Idea affect you, your community or the world?**”

I am the art-making expert in the process, so I give tutorials and demonstrations of the art process at the beginning of each assignment. Discussing the strengths and limitations of each material is essential so students understand what can and cannot reasonably be done with the particular media.
I also work as the art director in the design process. Students always brainstorm at least three variations of their ideas. At this point in the process there is always room for a group critique. Often, students take criticism and suggestions more easily from each other than from a teacher.

This meaning making process is not all peaches and cream. Some students really resist this process and do not know what to do with it. Some will fight, kicking and screaming through the entire semester, others will glom onto the idea and reach beyond your wildest dreams. Most of my students, by the end of the semester, understand how valuable the process can be if they put in the effort. This is truly a process in which the amount of energy or investment put in by the kids is directly related to what they will get out of the class. (effort=grade)

What I mean is this concept allows students to dive deep into their own experiences and things that matter to them. If they choose to do this, they end up caring a heck of a lot more about the work they produce. Students work hard, are willing to experiment and push themselves further in order to communicate their story more effectively.

Unfortunately, there is a flip side to this. The students that do not choose to dive deep come up with very trivial projects that often are not very well executed, because they are not as invested in their art making process. One of the things that can help facilitate deep diving is to have group critiques thought the process where students share their understandings and ask questions of one another. If everyone’s projects are on display
and everyone has to talk about their projects, it won’t be long before most students understand how much better their work can be and how much they have to say about their own perspective.

In order to do this it is important to facilitate a trusting environment. As a teacher you have to be compassionate, you have to care about each of your students, and make sure they know you value what it is they are trying to say. Some students are more willing to put themselves out than others; some are more guarded because of the social roles they play in the school and the class. It is important to be aware of these issues and encourage students to contribute only what they are comfortable contributing.

One more warning, this process is not for someone who wants to hide behind the podium or remain detached from their students. If you are not willing to open up about yourself, how can you expect students to be open with you? It is scary to let students ask questions. They will get personal when given the opportunity. Students are curious about their teachers and they are looking for an adult they can trust to be truthful, especially at the high school level.
At my high school, every teacher is expected to give a final. I have struggled over the years to find an assessment piece appropriate for measuring the enduring understandings students acquire during their semester with me. After Dr. Parson’s class I developed a combination presentation, portfolio assessment, and writing piece I feel meets both the requirements of my school and measures the student understanding I am interested in assessing.

The first time I used this combination portfolio/writing/presentation assessment I was truly nervous. I was worried students wouldn’t get it. I was apprehensive they wouldn’t want to share what they discovered over the semester. I knew they learned a great deal from one-on-one conversations in class but I didn’t know if it would come out in front of the entire class. Had I created an environment where these students felt safe enough to share their ideas without fear of ridicule?
My first graphics exam was with a class that was an absolute dream. The students were talented, intelligent, interested in learning, and most were even taking at least one other art class that year. My version of the Big Idea was developed just for this type of class. As the time for the final exam drew closer I realized I would know, once and for all, if the Big Idea was worth it. If it wasn’t going to work for this group, it was never going to work at all.

JAMES’S PROJECT

Figure 8.1 Portfolio Presentation
I wanted the presentations to work so badly and I wanted the process to go as smoothly as possible. I called on James to go first. James was a student I knew and liked well. He had been in art club, which I advised, since he was a freshman. I knew he was a hard worker, took every project seriously, and was not afraid to talk in front of the class. I was sure he would set the bar high for all of the other students. I hoped it would challenge the others in the class to take the presentation more seriously than they might have otherwise.

James stood up in front of the table where his projects were set up. A little sheepishly he said, "My Big Idea was uncertainty. Most of you know I am going to graduate this year and I am starting to really think about my future. I'm not sure where I am going to go to school or what I want to study when I am there so I thought uncertainty was a good choice for me."

"My first project is my collage. In the first collage there is a little boy crouched by the edge of the water. The little boy is looking down trying to decide if he will jump in or not. This picture represents the kind of uncertainty a child is faced with. To show another side of uncertainty I created an image of an older guy, his head is tilted upward and his arms spread slightly as if to ask a question. I chose this image because it represents the kind of uncertainty that I am facing right now."

"Are those flames around the guy in the second collage?" I asked him to help his presentation along a little bit.
“Yeah, I used red flame like images because the kinds of choices you make when you are older are more important. The blue in the first image represented water, which seems a little less threatening than fire, kinda’ like the uncertainty you face as a child.” As he continued with his explanation he became more confident and almost giddy. He was realizing how powerful his ideas really were.

“This is my personal logo. I chose a column and a wave to represent myself right now. I made a connection back to my first collage by using water. The water near the young boy was peaceful but water can also be violent and destructive. I thought it would be powerful to use the water again to represent the uncertainty in my life. I chose the image of a column because I like the perfection it represents. I try to be as perfect as I can in my life. People in my life always expect me to be strong and do the right thing, to be a pillar of strength so the column represents me. I combined the column and the wave because I wanted people to look at the column and wonder if it would be destroyed by the water or if it would survive.”

As I listened to James’ words, I became ecstatic to say the least. Inside I was doing a dance and whooping at the top of my lungs. At this point in James’ presentation I didn’t care if anyone else in the class got it, I didn’t care what else he said. I was elated the Big Idea made sense to him — he knew how to use it, he made artwork with it, and he was willing and able to articulate his thinking process to the class. This was it, this is what I had been trying to do for the past three years and it worked!
James wasn’t done yet. At this point I needed to calm my inner voice and pay attention for the last part of his presentation. He went on, oblivious to my inner celebrations, “My third project was the linoleum printing project. I used the image of the crouching boy from the first collage and put him on top of the column from my symbol project. I needed to show uncertainty again so I surrounded him with a sea of crashing waves like the ones from my personal symbol. This image is really about where I am right now. A lot of time I still felt like a kid but I have to make all of these choices that are really going to affect my future. I am worried about being swallowed up by uncertainty. Graduation is getting closer and closer, I have to choose what college I am going to go to and I am worried about making the wrong choice.”

James continued on for a few more minutes, answering questions from the class, giving more in-depth explanations of his thought process over the course of the semester. Right before he sat down he turned to me and said, ”Ms. Menke, you didn’t tell us this would take over our lives.”

“What do you mean?” I said, curious to see where he was going with this.

“I mean I think about my Big Idea all of the time. I am in the middle of math class and I have an idea for a work of art. I am eating dinner and I think about uncertainty in my family. It’s weird, I think about everything right now in terms of my Big Idea. I can’t get away from it.” As I looked around the room I saw a half a dozen other students nodding their heads in agreement.
I never expected the Big Idea to affect my students in the same way it affected me. When I came out of Dr. Walker's class everything in my life was framed in my Big Idea. For the next several months my thoughts, experiences, and art was flooded with the Big Idea of Change. I just wanted a way to make learning about art more real for my students.

James was taking the AP art class at the same time he was a student in my class. During the second semester he continued to explore his imagery and the Big Idea of uncertainty. I had several conversations with his teacher about how he was using it in his other works. She was really impressed because he was one of the few students able to work completely independent the second semester of the class. She said he was never at a loss for ideas and every time she turned around he had another piece of art he was working on. The only time she needed to talk to him was to check on his progress or to answer a technical question about a project he was working on.

There were others in the graphics class who had similar experiences, enough that I felt this process was worth continuing in future classes. There were some who did not have the life changing transformation like James. The students who didn't have a magical experience were moved by the testimony of those who did.

By the end of the two-hour final, all of the students agreed it was a worthwhile process to and that I should do it again the following semester. The students who didn’t get it were
also able to explain why. Most commonly they said it was because they didn’t put the effort into it. They didn’t want to try or in their own words, “were too lazy.”

I mentioned the written piece before, I didn’t read these until a couple of days after the final exam period. When I went to pick up the stack of papers I was excited to see if the words students wrote matched what they said in class. These were written at home, away from my prompting influence, and I wanted to see if the papers would be as meaningful as the presentations.

The top of the pile was a paper from one of my male athletes. Throughout the semester he gave me the impression, from his comments and behaviors, he was in class to get an easy A. Before I picked up the paper I wasn’t expecting much.

“My thought process started out at the beginning of the year as boring and simple. The whole big idea thing did not make sense to me. Before this class, my teacher would tell me what to make and I would make it. Now, I decide what to make, and now every single piece of art needs to have some kinds of meaning to it. As I got more projects my thought process got better.”

Generally, his ideas weren’t very interesting but he did improve slightly throughout the semester. It was encouraging that he noticed the effect of the Big Idea on his art making and his thinking. This writing represents students who are not invested in the Big Idea Process.
The next paper was from a student I wasn’t sure how to handle. She chose a very challenging big idea considering what she had been through recently. Her father had passed away just months prior and I was afraid it was going to be too much for her to deal with. This student represents what can happen when a really meaningful Big Idea is chosen.

"My Big Idea for class this semester was Life and Death. Last November my father passed away and my wonderment of what exactly life is began. The constant question "What would life be like if Daddy were here?" glooms over me. As I began to web and explore different ways to express my big idea, I evolved my though process.

I believe my big idea helped me in coming up with my projects and their ideas. I liked having a common theme between my artwork. I would definitely continue on with my big idea if I had more art classes. Making the web of ideas and words relating to my big idea also helped with the creation process."

The next student paper was from a young man who I had in homeroom for two years before having him as student. He always seemed a bit goofy and unfocussed. His artwork was always beautiful but I wasn’t sure it he ever really put much thought behind what he made. I couldn’t wait to see what he had written. This student represents the generally unmotivated type of student who is extremely creative, but often unfocused.
“In graphics class this semester, we learned many things. We learned how to make collages, print t-shirts, and make other art. But most importantly, we learned how to use our heads. When our teacher first told us that we needed to pick a “big idea” and base all our artwork in that class around it, I thought it would be easy. After I picked the idea of conflict, and started writing down topics within the big idea, I soon found out that this idea was bigger and deeper than I originally thought.

At first I thought, "Hmmm, Conflict...I'll just do projects on War and fighting."
As the Semester went on, my idea went from conflicts happening in the world right now, to the reason why those conflicts happen, and I thought that the reason why conflicts happen in anything is the clash of two different ideas. After this I realized that people are the only living things here on earth that fight over the earth. “

Obviously he thought a lot during the semester, a lot more than he let on to me. Reading his account blew me away. I knew he was capable doing wonderful work but to read the description of his process written in this unguarded way was very moving. During the final exam he joked around and didn’t take the presentation seriously. While he wasn’t able to shed his role as a class clown during the presentation his ideas came through in his paper.
I rarely heard more than three words at a time from the next student. She would always look at me with a slightly blank expression topped off with just a slight crack of a smile. It always looked to me like she was about to burst into laughter but I only saw her really laugh once in four years. I was eager to see how much she was willing to share in her writing assignment. This student represents my high achievers, the students who think a lot and really care about their results.

"In the beginning, the thought of having a big idea play a part in all of my projects for the whole year was pretty disturbing. Many times I got stuck trying to decide exactly how I could show my big idea in visual form. I found it very difficult to describe views of reality and how it relates to me through images. At first, I was focusing more on the line between dreams and reality, but then I realized that "views of reality" could mean anything — from a person's private point of view to a whole civilization.

I started with a collage showing a person with a closed point of view about the world around them — it showed a warm kitchen, surrounded by love, but outside the large window was destruction and fire. This showed the view of reality of a protected person and compared it to the outside world — depicted by destruction. My other collage was of an open desert where the sky was the galaxy and stars went on forever. In the corner was a butterfly on a red flower which I chose to symbolize freedom, freedom of thought in that instance, and the way the sky can
be the limit when you open up all options and doors in front of you with an uninhibited view of reality.

The research project helped me wrap up my big idea by helping me explore another artist and how he conveys his views of reality to the world. In the beginning of the year I was unsure of what I could do with a concept like "views of reality," now I see that it is a part of all our lives, and that it affects us all.”

She pushed herself to excel on every project despite her confusion. I would have never known the depth of her confusion if I hadn’t read this assignment. My Big Idea process provides many different ways for students to uncover their understandings. Most students work well in one medium yet they may struggle in another. To compensate for the students’ varying forms expression, including written, visual and verbal forms of communicating their knowledge has become a priority in my classes.

These examples of student writing were selected as generic representatives of what normally happens in my class with this process. Every semester, there are some students who try really hard and get great results, some who deal with their life events and come to a better understanding, some who never really try but understand the potential in the Big Idea Process, and some who accidentally become obsessed by their Big Idea.
There are two problems I have encountered in the three years I have been using the Big Idea in my classroom. One, certain students tend to resist the big idea and two, the time I have with students limits the depth of understanding and the development of their ideas. Both of these limits must be overcome in order for all of my students to understand the Big Idea and make informed, meaningful artwork.

I have noticed particular types of male students feel the Big Idea is limiting. Young male students who have little art talent or interest find it especially restrictive. Please understand I am not saying there aren’t female students who have the same problem there are just fewer of them. I hear many more young men saying things like, “why can’t we just make whatever we want.” When I respond with, “Okay, tell me what you want to make,” these students have a hard time coming up with an idea. Most of them, male or female, aren’t really ready to make whatever they want.
The reason male students resist the process more than female students may have something to do with the way our society expects the two genders to behave. As anyone who has been around high school students knows, young ladies and young men communicate in radically different ways. It has been my observation male students tend to do a lot of roughhousing and teasing. They aren’t usually comfortable discussing or expressing the way they feel other than embarrassment, amusement or anger.

In contrast, female high school students communicate with their female friends incessantly through notes, text messaging and talking. Most of them do not have any problem expressing their emotions or letting anyone know how they feel. In my classroom, I have noticed female students tend to embrace the brainstorming exercises. They are willing to write and to reflect on their work intensely.

Their resistance could also originate with their introduction to the Big Idea. I ask students to choose one Big Idea to use for the entire semester. The introduction may leave them with the impression the ideas can’t be modified or changed. Students take things very literally, it may mean I just need to be more careful in my explanations or, maybe I need to introduce a little more flexibility into my initial instructions.

Another possibility might have something to do with how this version of the Big Idea was developed. Dr. Walker is female, and she focused heavily on the works and interviews of Sandy Skoglund, a female artist, to help her develop her book. I am also a female who relied on the work of another female to develop an approach that worked for
me. I then translated my experience into something I felt comfortable using in my classroom.

There are hundreds of professional artists out in the world working today and I doubt there are any two working in exactly the same way. I do wonder now if my particular way of dealing with the Big Idea is biased toward a female perspective. Do female artists have particular ways of working that are distinctly different than their male counterparts? Does this mean male artists solve artistic problems differently from female artists? These questions might provide answers that will allow better access to both my male and female students’ creativity.

I also believe their resistance has something to do with maturity. These students are, after all, 14 to 18 years old and some of them I am meeting for the first time. It may be they don’t feel comfortable opening up and exposing some vulnerability in a room full of strangers.

As a teacher I acknowledge my students come into my classroom with very different levels of maturity, skill, background and knowledge of the arts, as well as interest level. At the start of each semester I have high expectations that all students can come to understand the meaning making process and make meaningful art, but I am realistic some will do much more with it than others. This is totally dependent on where they are, if they are willing, and if they are capable. Some students are just not quite there for one reason or another.
One semester is not a lot of time for some students to delve deep into the Big Idea. Most students are just starting to hit their stride with the Big Idea when the end of the semester arrives. This is remarkable considering I see them for 50 minutes a day 5 days a week for 17 weeks. I get almost 71 hours with my students. To get to the point where they see the value in making meaningful statements and have the power to do this, just like real artists, is an accomplishment in itself. I can only image what would happen if I had the students for a second semester. I have not had enough time to set them loose to investigate and create based on the background knowledge they have developed.

My personal experience with the Big Idea allowed me to follow my ideas wherever they went while simultaneously providing enough of a framework to keep me focused. The Big Idea is everything I had been searching for. It has given me a new way of examining my world and expressing myself. It has opened up professional and personal possibilities I never imagined. Most importantly, I now consider myself an artist and am developing a body of work.

Professionally, the Big Idea has added a new level of enthusiasm to my teaching. I have never been so energized about sharing ideas with my students. I feel I have found the missing piece I needed to round out my teaching. My classes are now more fluid and allow everyone involved the freedom to explore and play with ideas. Students come out of my class with the ability to generate ideas and allow them to create artwork on their own.
In the very beginning of the semester, I do explain the Big Idea is my way of fast-forwarding students through what takes professional artist decades to accomplish. At, or around, the age of 30, professional artists are usually off and running. They have developed their area of interest, their preferred materials, and even their “look” so collectors can recognize their work.

While my students aren’t quite where professional artists are by the end of my class, they understand what it takes to make meaningful artwork. Their artmaking is more focused because they don’t have to wander blindly through the creative process. My students’ decisions are well-informed, much more than mine were at their age. Also, students who are going on to study art have found the Big Idea especially useful for portfolio development.

Keep in mind, I have only used the Big Idea with students in a school system that separates high school art curriculum by media. There is a high priority put on getting student work into the Governor’s Show and the Scholastic Arts Competition. The way I teach the Big Idea is shaped by those two factors and my personal experiences.

For those of you who want to incorporate meaning making into your classroom through the Big Idea, I suggest taking bits and pieces of this process and tailoring it to your needs. There is no way to replicate what I do in my class exactly. We all have different teaching personalities, types of students, budgets, classes and interests. This process doesn’t work
the same way twice even for me. Though the process may differ a bit with each class, students always begin to understand how powerful making meaningful art is, they know they have something worth communicating about their perspective, and that unique solutions to artistic problems can originate from brainstorming activities.

Another suggestion I would make for any teacher new to the Big Idea is to start with one big idea for your whole class. This will help you control the chaos that can result from all the questions and uncertainties that arise from reframing reality in this way. It will be simpler when it comes to questioning strategies and group discussions if everyone in the room is examining the same Big Idea.

Don't worry. Having only one Big Idea won't limit you or your students, unless you want it to. You can provide a lot of freedom by allowing students to choose their own depth of field for their art making. That means students can determine whether they examine their personal relationship with the Big Idea and their own lives, the Big Idea and their culture, or the Big Idea and the world.

The Big Idea may be translated into the classroom in many different ways. On one end of the spectrum there is the approach, probably more suited to older art career minded students, which focuses on creating art like the professionals. On the other end of the spectrum is the very interdisciplinary approach of using the big idea to develop ideas, which is more suited to all range of students who are not pursuing art as a career. My
experiences in the classroom lead me to believe there are many right ways to approach the big idea. The right way is the way that best suits you and your students.

In order to determine the right way to approach the Big Idea, you need to examine the objectives you have for your students. My objectives are three fold, I want to teach all of my students to think in a more creative, critical way about their world and their place in it, to lean how to make meaningful artwork, and to do well in art shows and portfolio reviews. My approach to the Big Idea is tailored to achieve those things. So my students all choose their own big ideas and work on creating a series of works for a portfolio.

An elementary school art teacher, who may be more interested in developing thinking skills than a portfolio, might focus on working with the whole class on one Big Idea. This way, more time can be spent having group discussions and integrating knowledge from other subjects to further their understanding. Then teaching art skills necessary to make a work of art that communicates their understandings.

For example, in the right environment a third grade class could use the Big Idea in all of the subject areas to investigate their world. Students could learn writing, math, science, social studies, music, physical education, and art through the Big Idea of change. If all the teachers in one grade would get together and refocus their teaching on one Big Idea the walls between subjects could be broken down.
POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

In the future, I would like to develop a parallel approach to meaning making for those students that are not comfortable with self-examination or putting their thoughts or feelings on display. It is clear to me there are students, both male and female, who could be reached more easily through a different set of exercises.

Studying the artistic processes of both professional male and female artists to find out how they generate their ideas may lead to another meaning making process. It would be nice to have an option of brainstorming or problem solving for those students who don’t think in written or verbal form.

Personally, I would like to develop projects that create connections to other aspects of student learning in deeper and more meaningful ways. The ideal situation, in my mind, would allow students to carry their Big Idea into English, math, science, social studies and any other areas where meaningful connections could be made. What can they do with the Big Idea in these classes? How could it be used to inform their understandings and organize information they are learning in their other subjects?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

The Big Idea Worksheet
Welcome to Menke's...

**Really Really Very Big and HUGE Idea**

Big ideas (broad, important human issues) are characterized by complexity, ambiguity, contradiction and multiplicity. Whether stated as a single term, phrase or complete statement, big ideas do not completely explicate an idea, but represent a host of concepts that form the idea. For example, the big idea of conflict may represent a number of concepts, such as power, personal and social values, justice and injustice, and winners and losers.

Big ideas drive an artist's art making over time. They extend beyond individual artworks and encompass large portions, if not all, of an artist's body of work. Big Ideas represent the artist's overall purposes for art making, and they tell- in broad conceptual terms what the artist is about.

**Possible Big Ideas**
- Change
- Conflict
- Destruction
- Faith
- Identity
- Life and Death
- Power
- Relationships
- Rules
- Reality

- Aging
- Celebration
- Community
- Diversity
- Dreams and Nightmares
- Emotions
- Family
- Fantasy
- Heroes
- Idealism
- Materialism
- Nature and Culture
- Reverence for Life
- Ritual
- Social Norms
- Social Order
- Suffering
- Uncertainty
- Utopias
Discovering Personal Collections to the Big Idea

Please answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Why did I choose this idea? What interests me about this idea?

2. What are my experiences with this idea?

3. What questions do I have about this idea? What do I want to learn/investigate about this idea?

Please write 15 concepts about your big idea. To do this, complete any combination of the following sentences with your big idea.

*insert your big idea here* is about...  
_________________________ can be...
_________________________ represent(s)...
_________________________ is/are often...

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15.

Create a mind map, generating as many ideas about your Big Idea as you can. Put your Big Idea at the center and shoot off as many areas in your life or the world that are affected by the Big Idea. From each of those, shoot off at least ten things that are associated with those areas. From your ten things shoot off symbols or images that are associated with them, these will be a starter list of symbols to use in your artwork.

Portions of this worksheet adapted from *Teaching Meaning Making in Art* by Sidney Walker.
APPENDIX B

Research Project
Menke

Research Project

*For this research project you will be collecting information about a contemporary artist.*

Page 1: Title Page
Artist's name, your name, class period, teacher name

Page 2: 10 Important Bits of Information
These bits of information should be interesting facts about the artist. This information should include major life events that would have changed or affected the artist in some way.

Page 3: Works of Art
Collect 30 works of art by your artist include the title, date and media used for the works you select. For your presentation you will select 5 works that best support the information you present about your artist.

Page 4: Change Over Time
Explain how the artwork looked in the beginning. How did it change towards the middle of the artist's career? What did it look like recently? Were there any personal experiences that might have caused these changes? Use information from your research to support your ideas.

Page 5: Movement
Identify the art movement the artist is associated with. Describe what that movement looked like or was about. List at least three other artists that were a part of the same movement or closely associated with your artist. Include a work of art from each artist, the date it was made, the media and the title. Explain how the artists are similar or different.

Page 6: World Events
Identify world events that might have influenced the artist and their work. This could include wars, politics, social changes, and technological inventions.

Page 7: Obsessions
Usually artists have something that they do over and over throughout their career. This thing could be a media, art making technique, theme, symbol, or idea. Determine what this "thing" is and explain how it is used throughout the artist’s work.

Page 8: The Big Idea
Answer the question, why did the artist make this kind of art? What is the one word or phrase that explains the underlying theme in this artist's work over time. Please use examples from your research to support your ideas.
You must have at least three sources for your research. Include at least one printed source (this is not optional!). Web sites may also be used.

Artists to choose from:
Mordecai Ardon
William Bailey
Jean-Michel Basquiat
Fernando Botero
Coosje van Bruggen
Christo
Chuck Close
Richard Diebenkorn
Andy Goldsworthy
Sidney Goodman
David Hammonds
Keith Haring
Damien Hirst
Edward Hopper
Anselm Kiefer
Barbara Kruger
Jacob Lawrence
Henry Moore
Alphonse Mucha
Claes Oldenburg
Howardina Pindell
Man Ray
Gerhardt Richter
Lucas Samaras
Sean Scully
Wayne Thiebaud
Fred Wilson
Meg Webster
Walter De Maria
Nancy Holt

Richard Avedon
Aaron Bohrod
Deborah Butterfield
Dale Chihuly
Francesco Clemente
William De Kooning
Jim Dine
Leon Golub
Reginald Gray
Duane Hanson
Eva Hess
David Hockney
Jasper Johns
Ed Kienholz
Donald Lipski
Roy Lichtenstein
Robert Motherwell
Alice Neel
Judy Pfaff
Sigmar Polke
Robert Rauschenberg
Mark Rothko
George Segal
Sandy Skoglund
William Wegman
Andy Warhol
Mel Chin
Stan Herd

Associated Projects:
Description and Interpretation:
Choose one work of art by the artist and write a description and interpretation of the work.

Influenced Artwork:
Use some aspect of your artists body of work, themes, techniques, style, idea etc., to inspire an original work of art about your Big Idea.
APPENDIX C

Assessment Worksheet
Assessment Worksheet

Using complete sentences, please thoroughly answer the following questions in three to five sentences.

Current Project

1. Did you meet your goals? (The goals you set for yourself...). Please explain.

2. How did you use your big idea in his project? Did it evolve? Please explain.

3. How did this project compare with the others from this quarter?

4. What would you do differently next time? What would you change?

5. What direction are your ideas flowing for your next project? How could this project translate into the next project or another class?
In the space below please sketch/list the projects you have created to this point in the semester. (You may also write a description of the project)

Please take some time to look through your sketchbook at all of the things that you have written and sketched. In the space below write a brief description of how your thought process has evolved to this point. Make sure you describe how your thinking about your big idea has changed. Also, describe how this process has affected your art making.

What grade do you think you deserve on this project? Why?
APPENDIX D

Mind Map