

Mostly-Online MA Final

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By

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: The Use of Big Ideas in the Art Classroom

Chapter 3: Teaching Multicultural Education through Service Learning

Chapter 4: Conclusion

References

Chapter 1

Introduction

My name is Tammy Clifton and I have many labels that describe who I am. Some of the labels include parent, wife, art teacher, facilitator, supporter, cook, janitor, social worker, daughter, sister, friend, advisor, artist, caretaker, hard worker, and student just to name a few.

I have been married for twelve years and I have two sons. My oldest son, Noah, is 7 and my youngest son, Gabe, is three years old. My husband and my children are the greatest things that have ever happened to me. Add my career in there and I feel like life couldn't get any better!

Currently, my family and I live in the small town of Waverly, Ohio. We've been there for thirteen years. We live a very casual life in a very unique location. We live on Lake White, a small state-owned lake where we enjoy all kinds of activities throughout the year. We ice skate in the winter and water ski and boat in the summer. We are always outside or on the water in some way, shape, or form. It is our little slice of heaven on earth. We have wonderful neighbors too, that often host block party cookouts and other community events. With the various activities on the lake, it is like being on vacation all the time. We are extremely happy where we reside and I can't imagine living any place else. Sometimes we also like to get a little taste of city life and since our town is just a little over an hour away from Columbus and Cincinnati, we can easily have the best of both worlds.

As a child I grew up in Circleville, Ohio, another small town about half an hour from Columbus. I attended Logan Elm High School and graduated in 1990. From high school I went to The Columbus College of Art and Design where I spent two semesters on scholarship. I couldn't really afford the college even with my scholarship so I decided to work for a few years and then go back to school. I ended up getting hired at DuPont, a local factory, where I made a nice salary and had fantastic benefits. The only thing missing, and the most important, was job satisfaction. Even though I was in my early twenties and financially secure, I wasn't happy. I wanted to go back to school and be involved in something with some meaning. My co-workers thought I was insane to want to leave the job security I had at DuPont, but I knew in my heart I couldn't do that job for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, it took more than a few years to get back into school. Due to the fact that I worked 12-hour swing shifts, going to school was somewhat difficult to choreograph. I used 2-hour increments of vacation time to attend classes at O.U. Needless to say, it was a long, drawn out process but I was determined to succeed.

My determination paid off and I finally earned a degree in Communications and then I completed a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Art Education at Ohio University in 2005, all while working full-time and having a child to add to the mix!

It was an extremely scary, but exciting moment when I left DuPont. Once I left, I never looked back. I landed a teaching position at a small rural school about 20 minutes from my home. I was a little shocked by my first paycheck though. I remember actually asking my treasurer if there had been a mistake! I soon found out the real benefits of teaching wouldn't be found in my paycheck.

I now go to my job everyday looking forward to my students, my work place and my

position as a teacher. I have never been so satisfied or honored to be doing something in all my life. With my family and my career choice I have found the true meaning of happiness. In a way, I wish I could say that I have always been an educator but at the same time I feel fortunate to have had those life experiences that have shaped my identity and made me more appreciative of what I have now.

I am about to begin my fifth year of teaching art. I am still in the process of finding my "teaching way". I haven't quite settled into a certain routine and I actually hope I don't because I want to be known as a teacher that is constantly mixing things up and providing my students with new experiences. I feel as if I am in a great place to try new things and I am eager and dedicated to learn as much as I can so that I can provide my students with the best art education possible.

My School

Western High School is a rural school located in the small community of Latham, Ohio. After many years of having a substandard school facility, the district relocated in the late 1990's and built a beautiful campus that includes the elementary and junior high/high school buildings. The campus still looks brand new and is nestled in the hills of Pike County where it is surrounded by small farms and wooded areas. The setting is quite picturesque but as you leave the school grounds you encounter many dilapidated, abandoned, houses and buildings and obvious signs of economic depression. The school almost seems out of place amidst all of this but it is exactly what the area needs. The school has become the focal point of Latham because it is literally the only place in this remote location that the community members and students can gather for activities. It is

like that diamond in the rough, a symbol of hope for the future of the community.

Western is like any other high school except it is smaller scale. There are approximately 300 students enrolled in the junior high and high school and there are only 22 faculty members. There is little diversity among students or staff members. The majority of students qualify for free or reduced lunch and many also participate in the free universal breakfast provided before the start of the school day.

Due to the low socio-economic backgrounds of the students, very few opportunities exist for new experiences outside of the school. Parental involvement is low and many students live with siblings or parents that have dropped out of school. Many students rely on teachers for guidance, mentoring, and support.

My Classroom and My Students

The culture of the school is very conservative. Differences in opinion or appearance are not well tolerated. For example, students are prohibited to dress in anything considered outlandish by the administration. Students or teachers are not permitted to dye their hair two different colors or any color considered unnatural. The school community and officials take pride in the idea of traditions, which is an admirable quality in some respects. Unfortunately when change needs to occur it is a huge obstacle that takes time to overcome.

My school is improving little by little every year. The year I was hired there were six other new teachers hired as well. We all have a similar drive to push our students beyond what they think they are capable of achieving. We also consider our students' backgrounds and specific needs so we can do our best to create new and positive experiences for them. I believe this is something that was neglected in the past. I am

proud of my school and my students. I can see nothing but potential. I look forward to the changes to come.

What is my classroom like?

My classroom is a very comfortable place to learn. It has a casual yet visually exciting atmosphere. The walls are covered in various prints of artists from the past and present. Student work is also displayed and stored on open shelves throughout the room. A board is located at the front of the room that includes literature on art colleges, careers, current events, and notable quotes. The walls are also covered with murals based on big ideas, which is something we added this past year. Students are usually moving around the room, getting supplies, researching for their assignments, or working in studio. At times, my classroom sounds very chaotic to people passing by in the hall. They often come to my door to see what we are doing and much to their surprise they find my students engaged in their projects and discussing their assignments.

My students often make positive comments on the freedom that exists in my classroom. They enjoy learning and working in a way that best suits them. This can mean some are sitting on the floor, sitting in groups at a table, or working alone in a comfortable chair. They like the absence of the straight rows of desks and assigned seats. They are always rearranging the space to accommodate their needs. To other teachers, it may seem disorganized but to my students and me it makes perfect sense.

What are my students like?

My students are typical teenagers. They love their cell phones, i pods, digital cameras and friends. They all have unique personalities and they all like to participate in the drama of high school life. The one thing that is similar about them is their backgrounds.

The majority of my students come from very deprived home lives where even the most basic needs are not met. I also teach several students that already have children of their own. It amazes me how they can come to school, concentrate, and behave in a respectful manner considering everything that is against them. For many, school is the only place where they find consistency, safety, and the respect they deserve.

I find my students to be truly inspiring individuals. Many adults would not be able to function properly if they had to deal with the negative influences my students encounter on a daily basis. Despite the obstacles in my students' lives, they somehow find a way to see beyond their situations. When they come to my classroom they are eager to learn and experience new things. Every time we begin a project there is a genuine excitement, and a little uncertainty, in the air. I am always pleasantly surprised by their reactions and by their work. My students often reveal many things about their life through their art, which is a positive way for them to work through their problems and a great way for me to get to know my students. The philosophy of big ideas has further allowed me to teach my students in a way that the whole student is considered.

Chapter 2

The Use of Big Ideas in the Art Classroom

My very first class at the Ohio State University was AE 700 taught by Dr. Sydney Walker. The course was an introduction to the Mostly-Online Art Education Master's program. The class consisted of meeting the other students in my cohort, instructions on building our own personal website, assigned readings and discussions, and most importantly the introduction to the philosophy of using Big Ideas as a basis for teaching art in the classroom. Big Ideas are basically broad, umbrella-like themes that deal with the human condition. Dr. Walker stated, "In this approach, art making is considered as an exploration and expression of significant ideas with personal and cultural import" (Walker, 2006). In this strategy for teaching art, personal connections are interwoven with knowledge about contemporary artists and art making processes that connect to the world around us. At the time, I had no idea of the profound impact that the one-week on the OSU campus would make on my teaching practices and philosophy for teaching art. As the week progressed and I was exposed to this philosophy in more detail, I soon realized that the course would change not only my perspective on teaching art but also my students' perspectives about art and their engagement in my classroom.

During the course, Dr. Walker showed us examples of how contemporary artists work with these enduring ideas as basis for their art making processes. Artists like Judy Pfaff, Laylah Ali, and Alfredo Jaar were highlighted throughout the week. I remember watching in awe as Alfredo Jaar explained his work about Rwanda, so carefully and

compassionately raising his artistic voice against that violation of human rights. It was so compelling that I used his work several times in the following months to introduce my students to Big Ideas of Protest, Compassion, and Tolerance for others. The Art: 21 videos about the artists are a staple in my classroom now and give my students the opportunity to see how professional artists create their work based on important life issues that they can connect to their own personal lives and experiences.

Along with the use of Big Ideas, Visual Culture was also explored as a valid connector to my students' lives and art. Through the readings, discussions, and the presentation by Dr. Tavin, it became evident, and rather embarrassing, that I had been leaving out a very critical element in my teaching. During that week, as I learned more about how to incorporate Visual Culture into my lessons, it became obvious to me that I was completely overlooking one of the most important aspects of visual communication; the simple, the subtle, every day images that bombard everyone on a daily basis. This philosophy was not new to me but I had forgotten just how important and how effective these every day images were in forming our opinions, ideas, our morals, and social norms. The content about Visual Culture emphasized their importance and renewed my belief of the power of visual imagery.

I was, and still am, extremely excited about this new way of knowing and teaching art. It is the answer I was looking for to meet the needs of the specific group of students that I teach at my rural Southern Ohio school district. My teaching situation is unique regarding the population I teach compared to most art teachers, or teachers in general. The majority of my students live in extreme poverty. Out of respect for my students and their families, I won't go into detail about some of the horrific stories that I

have heard from my students about the lives they live. I can tell you that many of them come to school with adult worries on their minds. Many come to school without having their most basic needs met. Basic needs such as food, safe living conditions, and love seem to be special privileges that many of my students do not get to experience. When I first started teaching at my current school, I was so excited. I had all the knowledge from my undergrad coursework and I was ready to go. My excitement soon faded as I realized that my students needed much more than a course that taught them how to paint, draw, or sculpt. My students needed a course to make sense of it all. I soon realized that art was not considered a high priority to the students or the staff like it was to me. Daily, it seemed, I had to justify my subject to the students. Sometimes even to other teachers. Sometimes even to myself. The students reluctantly completed my color studies and value exercises. I thought I was really teaching art because they were actually “*doing*” something. I realized that this was not true engagement in art.

As a few years passed and I started figuring out how to teach a little better because I started to get to know my students on a more personal level. The students seemed to be a little more responsive to my lessons. I gained the trust of many students and had a positive rapport with most. The students seemed to have more interest but some still completed each assignment with little connection or enthusiasm. Knowing about my student’s backgrounds, I was constantly asking myself, “How can I make art a meaningful experience for my particular group of students?” It wasn’t until the first course with Dr. Walker that I finally found the answer. Teaching with Big Ideas made total sense and gave me the opportunity to teach the entire student. Olivia Gude further emphasizes a need for change by stating, “School art should reflect the art of our time.

The Modernist Bauhaus art making models are no longer appropriate for current classroom art making. Not only do these models leave students unable to relate to contemporary art making, but they deny them access to ways of creating artworks that have meaning and relevance for their own lives” (Walker, 2006). Using Big Ideas in my classroom is now allowing my students to connect personally and meaningfully to their own work. Recently one of my students was overheard explaining my art room (course) to a non-art student by stating, “ In here we make stuff that means something.” This is the biggest compliment to me as an art teacher and a true testament to what Big Ideas has done for my teaching and my students.

There were some major changes in the development of my school year curriculum that I had to make following the initial course with Dr. Walker. I decided I had to “quit: cold turkey” the old philosophy of technique and end product as the most important aspects of learning in my classroom. This idea was probably the most eye-opening concept about this philosophy. In my undergrad it was always about the product and how it looked. This new way of teaching art opened up a dialogue with my students who were uncomfortable with their art making abilities and allowed them to benefit from the art just as much as the “artistically talented or naturally artistic students.” This was a huge breakthrough. It gave them the freedom to take risks, confidence to participate, and a reason to be fully engaged in their own ideas for their work. Dr. Walker (2006) stated in one of our readings during her course that she feared that Big Ideas would become an add-on to existing curricula content rather than a truly transformative agent. She encouraged what she called a “radical reconstruction, not a cosmetic fix.” I started the radical reconstruction slowly by taking down my elements of Art and principles of design

posters and replacing them with Big Ideas and examples of contemporary works. I then looked at each lesson through a different lens, starting with a Big Idea then posing essential questions about that enduring idea. No longer did I start planning units based on an element of design or an art technique. Although, they are still important along with the state standards, they do not take precedent over the understanding and contemplation of the ideas behind the work. I have found that color skills and art techniques can be taught along the way, even on an individual basis, so that the student is receiving the most holistic art instruction, one that meets the needs of the students and the demands of the standards. My student Kayla stated, “We didn’t have ourselves in it like we do now.” I truly believe this is what has made the difference.

Now the Big Idea is the origin of all works created by my students. I relinquished some of my control as well and started forming lessons that allowed my students to create their own personal connection to the Big Idea and allowed them the opportunity to decide which art materials, techniques, elements, and other boundaries they wanted to include in their work. Since I teach high school students they relished in the fact that they had a part in the design of the lesson and the freedom gave them a true sense of accomplishment and pride as noted in quotes from my students that stated, “I can keep showing my potential. Every art piece I make now sends a message about something that is going on around me or around the world so it means more. I feel more confident about my work now because it is always about something personal, important, and close to me.” As a result of using Big Ideas as the new basis for my curriculum it has enabled me to help my students see value in their work. They create pieces that represent their emotions, their thoughts, and their lives. Something a color study exercise could never do. They see how

art can connect to their lives now. They are learning that art can be something that can connect to everything around them. They are learning about the influences of visual culture and forming their own views on topics important to them and the people around them. They are clearly learning how to use art as a vehicle to communicate through visual images about meaningful concepts. They are proud of their work and as a result of the changes, they are eager to talk about it.

Although I found successes in the initial changes, there were many obstacles I had to overcome as I pursued this new teaching philosophy. After taking the course with Dr. Walker, I spent the rest of the summer creating new lessons based on what I had learned at OSU. I entered the new school year that Fall excited and nervous regarding the change about to take place in my classroom. I was armed with new lessons and felt prepared to make a smooth transition from the old philosophy to the new. My students immediately saw the physical changes to their art room environment and began to ask questions. They listened intently about my new plans for the school year and how they would be exploring issues through Big Ideas and Visual Culture. I could hear groans of misery as I explained how they would write about their work and talk about their work more than the previous year. Then, once I felt I had explained the basics enough, I started in with the first Big Idea, Identity. It seemed easy enough for starters. With blank stares, the students look at me as if I had lost my mind. I tried to generate conversation about the idea but I had totally overwhelmed them with all the new changes that they could not understand what they were supposed to do. I realized I had to slow down, ease into this drastic change.

As the first few weeks passed my students and I learned how to “unpack” the Big Ideas as Dr. Walker suggested in the summer course. Together we slowly transitioned to using a Big Idea for each lesson, sometimes using the same Big Idea for a series of lessons. I found a trend with some students that were naturally interested in art. They always seemed to want to work on a series of pieces relating to one Big Idea while other students always seemed exhausted with an idea and wanted to move to a new one for the next lesson. I learned to adapt to their needs and allow them the freedom to follow their own ideas. Although the majority of my students proved to be much more engaged in their work after incorporating Big Ideas into my curriculum, I still had a few students that struggled with connecting personally to any Big Idea. They always seemed to give superficial responses and I could never get them to think deeply about the topic, whether the boundaries were loose or restricted. I believe this to be one of the biggest challenges as a teacher, realizing and accepting the fact that there will be students I won't be able to reach no matter how I try. I won't give up though.

I continue to work on shaping my lessons to create engagement in my students. One lesson in particular that spawned into many other learning activities was a Unit based on the Big Idea of Protest and the work of Alfredo Jaar. My students and I started off by discussing the idea of protest. We defined it, gave examples of it from current issues at school and in the community, we talked about things worth protesting or fighting for, then they wrote about a personal experience where they participated in a “protest” of an important issue. I had them keep everything they wrote about in their portfolio folders so they could reflect upon the discussions later. Our group discussions led to topics such as abortion, racial issues, and other controversial topics. My students

spent three full class periods discussing important and relevant topics of protest. We then viewed Alfredo Jaar's Art: 21 video segment about his work about the Rwandan genocide. My students couldn't stop talking about *The Silence of Nyduwayezu*, 1997. It had impacted them as it did me in my course with Dr. Walker. My students could easily link the Big Idea and the topic investigated by Jaar. Seeing how he researched his topic in person and how he made conscious decisions about the visual images he used to convey his message gave my students endless ideas about what art can be and be made out of.

We then explored current issues involving genocides today and studied content about Darfur. My students were overwhelmed in realizing the situation was happening as we sat in our classrooms. The students wrote about their thoughts in a free write journal page, adding this piece of writing to their portfolios. My students were so moved by the images they saw about Darfur that they participated in One Million Bones, an art installation that will be displayed on the National Mall in Washington D.C. in 2013. They learned how to become activists through art, an added bonus I did not plan for in this lesson.

Once my students explored the Big Idea through personal experiences and gained some artistic knowledge about a contemporary artist, I had my students create a list of words pertaining to the Big Idea. For each word they created a visual sketch for their chosen topic under protest. Some chose the accessible topics we covered like genocide or more specifically the situation in Darfur, while others chose a more personal topic that had to do with being bullied at school or some other personal issue they wanted to speak out about. One student in particular created a series of megaphones made out of clear overhead transparency paper, opening up new possibilities of endless non-traditional art

materials to the class. One megaphone was open with three-dimensional words flowing out of it, another megaphone was tied to a base with jute rope, and the last megaphone was closed with duct tape on one end. The student explained in a presentation/critique that the megaphones represent voices of people. She stated, “Some people will protest and create change while other stay silent purposefully while they watch things stay the same. Others may want to speak out in protest but they are the victims of the injustice and need someone to speak for them.” That student and many others thought deeply about the idea of protest and brought a new perspective and idea to the surface.

There were other instances over the past few years that have shown me that students are benefiting from using Big Ideas. One situation, I remember about using Big Ideas came to me when a couple of my students traded places with me and became teachers for a class period. It all came about one day when I was in class with my youngest group of students. The class was a lively mix of 8th graders. I had my hands full with this particular class and considering the fact that I was outnumbered by 30, I had to keep moving around the room nonstop for the entire class period just to maintain crowd control. It was ten minutes into the class period when I noticed someone at my door. A few of my high school art students who were working on their projects in the hall led a young girl over to me and introduced her as a new student. I greeted her, but before I could offer any other information a few of the 8th grade students started to be disruptive. Seeing that I would need to attend to these behaviors, the older students offered to get the new student situated.

When I finally had everything under control and all of my students were once again working, I started to direct my attention to my new student. As I walked toward my high school students and the new student they had just taken under their wing, I was pleasantly surprised to overhear their perspectives on my art class. One student started the conversation off with this comment. “It’s has a good aura in here. It’s like an escape for me. You can make something beautiful or shocking. You don’t have to be a good drawer.” Another student chimed in by saying, “Yeah, I used to hate art at my other school because it was all pencil and paper. It was totally different then. Now we have choices. You can go your own way with your projects in here, instead of just what the teacher wants you to do. We use Big Ideas for every project. There are some up on the board in the back of the room.”

When the students saw the confused look on her face they further explained how to use Big Ideas and how they have made their work more meaningful.

Morgan went on to say, “They keep you on track. I know what I am working on at all times. Big ideas always allow me to make work that relates to me. I do better with my work when I can relate it to me.”

“They give you a structure to build on, so it is still your own idea”, Darian added.

Morgan immediately commented, “Yeah, it’s like they give you that base structure, like a slab of concrete. Like when you build a house, but in here each house is different depending on the builder, or art student, that makes it.” Hearing their comments confirmed that Big Ideas had a significant influence on their perspective on art class and their appreciation and understanding about art in general.

Teaching art at a rural, Appalachian school district in itself has been quite a culture shock for me. I have never personally experienced poverty. I always had family support from very loving parents, and I lived in an area where there was plenty to see and do. My students, on the other hand, have limited access to experiences beyond what our school and teachers provide. Sadly, many of my students do not have support from their families. I have learned a lot from my students. They bring many different experiences to my classroom. They make me want to do my very best for them. My goal as an art teacher is, of course, to give my students the best possible art education they deserve but I also know that my students have special needs and I have to incorporate their lives into my lessons in order for them to have a meaningful experience that can last them a lifetime. Olivia Gude (2007) asks the question, “Considering that this may be the last Art class my students will ever take, what do they need to know in order to begin a lifelong engagement with the Art of the past and the unfolding future?” Her words are always resonating in the back of my mind as I think about how to approach teaching art. What should I teach? What is relevant to my students? What really matters to them and will help them become better people? Big Ideas have allowed me to teach art to students that have always viewed art as something they could never be a part of or something that could never be apart of them. I truly believe that using Big Ideas has given me the change I so desperately needed in my teaching and the change I desired for my students’ learning. As a direct result of my contact with Dr. Walker and the content of the course, I will continue to improve upon my teaching strategies using Big Ideas and I will continually reflect upon my classroom practices making every effort to give my students the most holistic art education possible.

Chapter 3

Teaching Multicultural Education through Service

Learning in the Art Classroom

Course Overview

Art Education 767D is a course addressing multicultural issues in the classroom and in society. I assumed it would be like many of the other courses I had taken in my undergrad that involved other cultures but this one was very different. It was not focused on learning about a different culture or group of individuals then making an art object pertaining to that culture. Instead, we investigated each topic and were forced to take a hard, and often difficult, look at ourselves. We viewed multicultural education from a totally new perspective and the knowledge I gained from this course has not only changed my classroom practices but has also made me reflect upon my own personal experiences, feelings, and even biases regarding people with differences.

The course topics included gender, age, race, class, religion, and many other delicate issues that are often downplayed, even ignored, in a classroom setting depending on the school culture. Videos and literature about these issues were interwoven with discussions about personal stories relating to the topics. One of the most important aspects of this course was a service learning assignment where we were required to have our students work with another group of people with differences. This was an authentic learning experience that changed my curriculum and will continue to affect it in the

future. I was especially interested in this course not because I teach at a diverse school district but because I teach where there is little diversity. This course and instructor provided me with tools to use in my classroom to create opportunities for my students and I to work with others from different backgrounds and be more tolerant and compassionate citizens.

Physical Environment

I started teaching at a very small, rural school in Southern Ohio located in the Appalachian region five years ago. I have to admit, it was quite a culture shock for me because my background was quite different from many of the other teachers and students. We have approximately 300 students enrolled in our junior high and high school. All of our students receive free breakfasts, and almost all of the students receive assistance with lunch as well. All of the students and teachers are Caucasian and many of the students' families have lived in the area for generations. The area of Latham, where the school is located, has no large businesses or factories, only a small local store where everyone goes for all of their essential items. Unemployment is high and a large number of my students are living in substandard conditions where a number of their basic needs are not being met. The remoteness of the area and the secluded lifestyle of the community members seem typical of the Appalachian culture. The area is known for its lack of resources and extreme poverty. Many of my students do not have the means to travel beyond the borders of the county and considering the rural location most of my students have not had any opportunity to interact with people from other cultures, ethnic backgrounds, or even

other religions. You can definitely see how influential visual culture can be when a television and the Internet is the only view a person has of the outside world. My students have many misperceptions about other groups of people and their values and beliefs. This is why I became so interested in the multicultural course and the perspective in which it was taught. Through this course I found that my students wanted to learn about others and were willing to start questioning and changing their attitudes and beliefs about others when given the opportunity. The service learning assignment allowed me to meet the needs of my students and the community by creating new experiences with other groups of people and promoting opportunities to learn about other people with differences.

Lesson Plan and Development Changes

As a direct result of this course, one of the major changes I made to my curriculum this year was adopting the philosophy of arts-based service learning. It fit perfectly with my particular students and the results have been nothing but positive. After I took the course I found myself looking for ways to incorporate service learning into my classes throughout the duration of the year. My students and I worked on four other service-learning projects after this course and my students still wanted to do more. In all four, my students were not only genuinely engaged in their learning but they were truly reflective about their experiences. I could see small changes in their attitudes and their comments. One student made this statement after our service learning assignment with students with disabilities. "I never even thought about this group of students until now. I was afraid and I didn't even know why. Now I feel like I am friends with the other students and we shared a good experience and connection just through our mural."

I will have the opportunity to teach a select art course next school year and I plan to use this course and its vast amount of resources as the model with an emphasis on service learning. It will be a difficult task because all of our field trips have been cancelled for next school year due to budget cuts. I thought this would be something the students would just accept but they are already generating ideas about future service learning opportunities that we can have at our school and they are even creating a list of fundraising ideas to pay for busing to another location. One student summarized why service learning is important by saying, “We listen all day long to lectures from our teachers and our parents about how to treat other people that are from different places. This (service learning) gives us the opportunity to actually practice those things.” I truly believe that these types of encounters and interactions have made a difference in my students’ views. I feel that service learning, like art, gives the students hands-on experience that reflects real world situations and makes the information they learn practical and easily generalized to other areas of their lives.

Teaching Practices

Another major change in my teaching practice was the personal self-reflection on my beliefs and values. This was a difficult thing to do, as self-reflection often is when you feel you have nothing but good intentions. I first had to admit that I, personally, have certain biases and views, then I had to look honestly at them and see how they were possibly affecting my students. As I mentioned previously, I experienced a culture shock when I started teaching at my current school. I immediately asked myself how I was going to approach teaching students that were so different from me. It was a lot of trial

and error, and more error! It is something I still struggle with in this school district. At times I feel like I want to change my students, but at the same time I want them to feel proud of who they are and the culture they come from. Seeing the video, native tongues, really made me question my intentions in my practice when it comes to the Appalachian culture. I continue to battle the question, “Am I trying to help my students be successful in life or am I trying to change my students to meet my particular standards and beliefs of how to live?”

Another area in my practice that I have felt I needed to address is my own personal agenda to empower females in my classroom. I believe it stems from me being raised as an independent female. I find I resist the communities’ gender roles and encourage my female students to be more independent and confident, something I should be encouraging all of my students to do. However, I have noticed that I am leaving my male students out in certain instances and missing opportunities to connect with them and foster those same ideals. I have started to make a concerted effort to include males in my goal of empowerment. Instead, I now look at it as a challenge to create an environment in my classroom and my practice where all of my students gain a new sense of worth and confidence through my assignments, comments, and actions, a change that benefits everyone not just the females in my classroom.

I always thought I exemplified the idea of equality in my classroom but as I looked back on my practices I found I fell short. I am now more aware of my actions and I stop to think about how my comments and views may leave some students feeling marginalized or even ashamed of where they come from and who they are, things I never want my students to feel.

New Teaching Experiences through Service-Learning

The very first video in the course was *Starting Small* where teachers at a school were addressing the color of skin with their young students. It was such a great video showing how students are different but how differences can be appreciated and valued. The video was encouraging because it reminded me that in order to create change for the better I would need to “start small” with learning activities that would promote changes in my students’ misconceptions and misunderstandings of others with differences. The service-learning assignment in this course was a prime opportunity to get my students and I started in the right direction.

I decided to ask the students from the Pike County Board of Developmental Disabilities to collaborate with my students on a mural about the big idea of “community”. I called the teacher and I was pleased to find out that she was as excited as I was about the opportunity for our students to work together. We planned the activity by meeting one day and followed up with a few phone calls to work out last minute details. Since the mural was based on the idea of community we decided to have the activity at our local library, a centrally located building in a highly traveled area. Not only did we want our students to work together but we also saw an opportunity to include other members of our community to participate as well. We were also in agreement that the activity would be a peer-to-peer collaboration. My students understood this from the start as a result of discussions about the benefits of what we could learn from the other students and what they could learn from us.

My main goal for the lesson was for my students to gain an appreciation for others with differences. I also wanted the students to learn how art can help in the development of relationships with others and bring together groups that are different while creating a sense of unity and common ground. I wanted my students to realize that everyone has something to contribute and we can all learn important lessons from each other regarding a variety of issues such as tolerance, compassion, grace, and acceptance. I also wanted my students to realize the difference between community service and service learning. Community service is mostly a one-sided action where only one party benefits from the other and service learning is where both parties are engaged, learning, and benefiting from the exchange of knowledge.

The activity started with my students and I meeting the other students at the library. There was an introduction session and a short discussion and explanation about the project. The students worked on canvas boards, painting them with images of their interpretations of “community”. There were many different images created in our session together. People from the community slowly filed in to the room as we worked throughout the morning on the boards. The canvas boards would later be mounted to a very large framed canvas with the words “Community Together Makes Life Better”. It is currently displayed in our school but will travel to different locations on a planned “traveling mural” route. Several businesses have agreed to display the work throughout the following school year.

In the end there were several different groups working on the project, more than we planned for that experience. There were, of course, our students and then there were several adults with different backgrounds to add to the learning. We met a minister from

a local church, a lawyer, a police officer, a restaurant owner, and some other individuals that decided to join us while visiting the library. Everyone was truly engaged and enjoying the interaction, the collaboration, and conversation as they got to know each other in this short time frame. Although most of the students from the other class were non-verbal the exchange was just as important and effective as any other encounter.

The day ended with a lunch of pizza provided by an anonymous donor that passed by the library and heard about our project but didn't have time to stay. All of the students enjoyed lunch together then boarded the buses. The entire way back to our school my students talked about doing another project with the same students and by the time we reached the school they already had a concrete idea about creating tie blankets for kids at Children's Hospital.

A large part of service learning is reflection. Kraft states, "In the reflective component, students utilize higher-order critical thinking skills to create understanding of the combination of formal learning with the service experience (Kraft, 1996). My students wrote about their experiences through a reflective summary of the event. I found comments about initial fears, misconceptions, and stereotypes prior to the activity. Many of the students commented on overcoming their fears and eventually enjoying the other students as they learned how to communicate through their non-verbal cues. Some of the students were still indicating they were uncomfortable with the activity before and even after the experience. They revealed some pretty honest feelings but I believe they grew from the opportunity to look at their own personal views and beliefs, as I did through the multicultural course. I believe they became more aware of their own perspectives and some of my students even told me they were a little ashamed with their thoughts prior to

the project. I completely related to these comments as I engaged in my own self-reflection throughout the quarter. Many of my students revealed thoughts about their misconceptions on how people with disabilities “behave” and also admitted to assuming that they would be doing the majority of the work for the other students. A few students addressed feelings of sympathy for some of the other students. We talked about this and found that their feelings were more appropriately termed as compassionate and caring rather than sympathetic. One student gained inspiration from the other students by saying, “That made me feel bad, not for the other students but for me. I complain about silly stuff and sometimes I am afraid if something changes. The other students had no fear. I learned a lot from them. That’s what I will remember most.”

The majority of reflections seemed to be about extinguishing stereotypes and misconceptions, however, there were still a few students that wrote about the experience as if we were doing a favor for the other students. They may have even eliminated some misunderstandings only to replace them with a new generalization about people with disabilities based solely on that one experience. There will have to be more learning opportunities in the form of service learning to take my students and me to the next level of understanding.

Since the course ended, my students and I have been involved in four other service-learning projects. The first project consisted of making tie blankets for children’s hospital. My students collaborated with the same students and created 20 tie blankets together at our school for sick kids at the hospital.

Another project called the One Million Bones project, consisted of my students learning about the genocide in Darfur, and participating in the One Million Bones

fundraiser for victims' families and survivors of genocide. My students were required to collaborate with other students in our school that they did not know prior to the activity. They chose students outside of their clique group and taught them about the situation in Darfur through a small presentation, then together, they worked on creating bones to submit for the art installation at the national mall in Washington D.C. for display in 2013.

Another service learning project called Houses for Haiti consisted of my students and students from another county high school working together to create small decorative pins in the shape of houses to sell as a fundraiser for the victims of last year's earthquake in Haiti. This was a project that was repeated from earlier in the year but we included a different set of students.

The last service-learning project consisted of my students and some elementary students from our school district. The project was based on the International kids-Guernica Mural project I learned about in an intensive summer course at the Ohio State University where I worked in collaboration with a group of Somali-American Children. In that project and the one at our school we created huge movable murals based on the idea of "peace".

Conclusion

In all situations the service learning fit neatly within the concepts of the unit lessons and was an enrichment activity for all of my students no matter what their level of study. My students will remember these experiences for a long time to come and they continually express interest in pursuing other similar project in the upcoming school year. We recently talked about several ways of working with groups of other people, even

through skype or video conferencing, but my students decided against it by stating, “The whole idea of service learning is to actually work, side-by-side with the other group of people in order to reach that goal or make that project. How can we really do that if we aren’t physically together? It would be just like all the other classes, where they tell us about all that stuff but we never actually get to experience it. It just wouldn’t be the same.” I feel as if my students are truly starting to understand how important these experiences are and how they can benefit from the collaborative work completed in service learning. The self-reflections and the changes in attitudes are a true testament to the power of service learning. The projects that we have been a part of have certainly not been perfect but I feel as if they have significantly improved my class content and addressed many concerns we have in our society. The course philosophy has specifically been something I have wholeheartedly embraced and will continue to practice throughout my teaching career and my personal life.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The Mostly-Online master's program has changed my perspective and overall philosophy of teaching of art. I can honestly say that I learned more in this program from the professors, and the other teachers in my cohort, about teaching art than I did in my undergraduate program. I almost feel slighted when I think about how I was originally taught to deliver the product-driven curriculum of the past. This program and its current trend of teaching opened up art to every student in my classroom, not just the talented and gifted art students. The results of adopting this philosophy have helped my students gain access to art by showing them that they can participate and be engaged in a subject they once thought to be out of reach. The big idea philosophy has allowed each student, in my classroom, to connect to his or her work and create pieces of art where the meaning is more important than the end product. When I try to think of the one idea that I learned from this program that made the biggest difference I have a very difficult time narrowing it down to only one because all of the ideas worked seamlessly together to create the ongoing changes I now have in my classroom. If I must choose, I would have to say that one of the most important things that this program has given me is the opportunity to teach my students in a way that has given them more confidence to investigate ideas that are important to them and create a tangible response to these ideas conveying a message to the viewer without fear of technical mastery. My students are beginning to accept they have different gifts and abilities but they can all benefit from, and enjoy, art and the

process of making art. This program has made me a better teacher by allowing me to practice these new methods in real-life situations with my students. The knowledge I have gained from this experience has given me a new excitement about teaching art and an insatiable appetite to learn more.

An area that I want to continue to build upon in my practice is the encouragement of deeper thinking when it comes to big ideas. The majority of my students understand the investigation, the personal connection, and the meaningful response but I still have some students only at the surface of the enduring idea. My goal is to create more in-depth activities to get them to dig a little deeper. To do this, I believe I will have to do a lot of researching and deep thinking as well in order to meet this goal. With my new knowledge of action research, I believe I can utilize those methods and find out what my students want and need.

Another area I want to continue to do more frequently and formally is reflection. This entire program has been about reflecting on my practice and learning to take an honest look at what works and what does not work in the art classroom in order to establish a meaningful curriculum. I have been taken aback by this new philosophy and, at times, a little embarrassed by some of my practices but it has been such a great learning experience that I will continue to grow from well into the future. I feel I am more thoughtful on every level concerning my teaching strategies, my personal biases, and the way I interact with my students. It has made me step back and look at my own personal beliefs about teaching art and encouraged me to change for the betterment of my students.

As I reflect on the last two years, I see considerable growth in my students and in my ability to teach art. I think about how far my students and I have come together in this journey and I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish. As I have mentioned previously, art has not been a highly valued subject at my school for many years but every day I see my students connecting more and more to art. This is not to say I have perfected the “art” of teaching art but it is a true testament to what this program has given me, which is the ability to teach students how to appreciate art and possibly have a life-long engagement with the arts. For this, I am very grateful to have been a part of this amazing learning experience.

Works Cited

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