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M.A. in Art Education - 2011
The Ohio State University

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Biography

I was born on December 20th, 1981 in Tarzana, California. I grew up in Valencia, a suburb about an hour north of Los Angeles. When I was in third grade, I knew I wanted to be an artist. My teacher really strove to take my talents to another level. She encouraged me to enter my artwork in a local newspaper contest, of which I won first prize. Later that year, I was creating drawings that were to be used in the yearbook. My passions for art grew from those experiences. The prominent art school of Cal Arts was not far from where I grew up. As I got older, I frequently sat in on figure drawing classes at the school as well as sketched people at the local mall. As a young high school student, it was both overwhelming and inspiring walking the halls of Cal Arts and viewing the incredible drawings that covered the walls from floor to ceiling. Discovering my passion was easy, however my next mission was figuring out how to utilize it. During my first summer at California State University Long Beach, I took an art education class that allowed me to teach a summer art camp for children aged eight to fourteen. I instantly enjoyed the overall teaching aspect and following that experience I enrolled full time into the art education program. With the avenue of teaching, I would be able to share my passion with others.

In addition to teaching art, I am active artist. I focus primarily on painting and printmaking. Many of my paintings revolve around the act of decomposition from a macro perspective and the rebuilding from a micro perspective. From a decomposition perspective, I have always been fond of tattered buildings that show rust and chipped away paint. I grew up in a house that was built with a substantial amount of bricks that each had their own unique, distressed characteristics. That is where I believe my

fascination with objects that show signs of age began. Beyond my home, to this day, I am constantly photographing anything in Los Angeles that shows wear. Leaking sewer pipes, large decrepit potholes, rotting wood siding, these items are all documented. These places contain a dynamic and rich history that often get overlooked because of its exterior condition, however I am drawn to them. I will take the previous settings and juxtapose them with objects from nature that deal with reconstruction. I will overlap and integrate the previous objects with organic items such as microorganisms developing or plants growing. Growing up, my parents would take me on several camping trips a year. We would often go to places within the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. I would spend much of that time going on hikes and exploring nature. This is something that has been passed on to me and I have developed a passion for. I have come to have a greater appreciation of nature and identify the beauty that lies within. From each trip, I take back new experiences that not only allow me to grow as a person but an artist as well.

Description of the School

Beverly Vista School is located in the southern section of Beverly Hills, California. Affectionately known as "BV", it is truly a neighborhood school. BV is a K-8 formatted school with a population just over 700 students. The school has won countless awards and certificates including being recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School. Although newly renovated as a result from earthquake damage, the school itself has been serving Beverly Hills since 1925. Because of this long tenure, there is a great deal of loyalty and pride for those people that have walked the hallways at one time or another. Parents who attended Beverly Vista many years ago return to the area so that their

children may also attend BV. It's not uncommon to have second and third generation family members attending this school. Alumni always regard themselves as part of the Beverly Vista family. The once homogeneous student population has changed dramatically in the last two decades. The students come from more than 20 countries with Iran, Korea, and Israel being the largest non-US groups. An impression of Beverly Hills might be that it is full of wealthy, prosperous families. While for some this may be true with some, our families represent a cross section of socio-economic levels and include many single-parent households and families who receive free and reduced lunches. As a result, we are designated a targeted assistance Title I school. Our population also includes a significant number of students who qualified for Special Education as well as students who are part of the Gifted and Talented Education program. The wide sense of diversity is a strength for our school. The K-8 format allows the students to grow and mature at a slower, natural level. Middle school students become role models for many of the elementary students. Issues like theft, violence and fighting, foul language, and even committed relationships, are virtually non-existent at our school and in our hallways.

Description of the Students

This is my fifth year teaching at Beverly Vista. Being the sole art teacher, I see most of the 700 students in a given week. Starting in first grade, students receive art instruction from me. Each week, the lower elementary receives 30 minutes and the upper elementary receives 50 minutes of instructional time. For middle school, I teach one ceramics and two general art sections. All of the middle school classes are comprised of a mixture of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. Although I teach the entire school

population, I chose to focus the following papers exclusively on my middle school art classes. For the interviews, I chose three eighth grade students. Because of a lack of elective choices at our school, it is common for students to have taken the same elective on multiple semesters. The students who were part of my interviews, are ones who have taken my class before my implementation of big ideas and emphasis on the process of artmaking, as well as after the change.

Leer- She is one of several students in my class that currently has an Individualized Education Plan. She does well in all her classes and always positive and adds insight into the conversation. Her artwork often relates to popular culture.

Hannah- She is traditionally a low-performing student in the majority of her classes. She is very outgoing and not afraid to express her thoughts when she likes or dislike something. Her artwork incorporates lots of text to emphasize the big idea.

Lucas- He is a student who is known for being smart, yet sneaky. He does well academically, and when he misbehaves he knows how not to get caught. His artwork works on many in-depth layers and involves symbolic imagery.

Kinley- He could fit the mold of what a stereotypical middle school boy would be like. He occasionally gets misguided and gets distracted by his peers, so he needs to be refocused. Much of his artwork revolves around his interests of video games, skateboarding, and anything that incorporates violence.

Jasmine- She is a very quiet student who keeps to herself most of the time. Her writings are extremely detailed and thoroughly explain the depth of her meaning. She is very attentive with her artwork and wants it to be exact.

Miguel- He is one of my English Language Learners. His work is very personal and uses it to express his emotions. He is able to verbally explain his intentions and purposes for every element included in the work.

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AE 607: Designing Meaningful Curriculum
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Content and Purpose

The Designing Meaningful Curriculum course further expanded my understanding of how big ideas and contemporary artists can be used in the classroom. By examining artists in the PBS Art21: *Art in the Twenty-First Century* series, I was taught to develop more of an understanding about the ‘why’ in addition to the ‘how’. I would no longer be looking at and examining art from strictly a formalist perspective. Instead, my curriculum would focus on areas such as content, meaning, and process. This course challenged our role as a teacher and made us examine our own practice. We are destined to be able to enhance our student’s personal relevance to the world around them and help them to expand upon how they see the world. By connecting art to contemporary visual culture, students can see how the visual lens can be used beyond the walls of the classroom. Because imagery is so prevalent in the world today, an item does not have to be classified as ‘art’ in order for me to justify talking about it. The process of how that image was created and the purpose it serves, is equally valuable towards a discussion. By placing focus and attention on the process, students are expanding their skill of creativity. Students can be taught how to think like an artist and how artists develop their ideas. As Olivia Gude states, “When planning a beginning art curriculum, every teacher should ask, “Recognizing that this may be THE LAST ART CLASS my students will ever take, what do they need to know in order to being a lifelong engagement with the art of the past and of the unfolding present?”¹ The students that leave our class should be prepared to be visual thinkers and be able to make conscious aesthetic and interpretive decisions the rest of their life.

¹ Gude, 1

Beliefs and Values

Early on in this program, it was a bit daunting knowing that I would have to go through an unlearning process, starting over again from scratch. Throughout my life, much of both my own learning and teaching surround art has been primarily based on the product rather than process. Knowing that I had this huge elephant in the room weighed heavily on me. I had tried various lessons that incorporated a more process-oriented approach, but still found myself more focused on the product. It was during the *Designing Meaningful Art Curriculum* course that things began to fall into place. The course allowed us to really dive into and examine several of the Art21 artists. Discussions revolving around how these artists can be incorporated into our classroom proved very helpful. From the examination of those artists and using them as examples, it allowed me to understand more about how artists and big ideas are tied in together. That seemed to be the biggest missing piece for me. Up until that point, I saw these artists in these films as simply more of another average resource for the classroom. But when seeing that the artists themselves were organized by themes, and exploring how despite their differences in areas like philosophy, demographics, and medium, their content all had a similar underpinning.

Back in my classroom, it was half way through the semester last year when I wrote a question in the middle of my whiteboard and circled it. The question, ‘How do artists get their ideas?’ was surrounded by vast nothingness. As the students walked in that day, they inevitably saw this written on the board. As they sat down, I asked this seemingly simple question to them. Hands came up. One person said ‘memories’, which I

wrote on the board, circled, and connected to the question. I followed with ‘What kinds of memories are there?’. Responses such as ‘childhood’, ‘positive’, and ‘negative’ were all called out and then written, circled, and connected on the board creating a giant web diagram. The activity continued with a constant dialogue addressing main categories like ‘history’, ‘dreams’, ‘where they live’, ‘other artists’, and ‘nature’. What went from what was once a completely empty board, to now, a board completely filled with ways in which artists get their ideas. I erased the initial question and in its place wrote, ‘How will you get your ideas?’.

That activity allowed me to see clearer and have a greater understanding of the changes I needed to make. It inspired me to work hard that night and many following nights to come in putting together a more student-led curriculum. I would allow the students to have more of a say in what they want to learn and be an integral part of the direction of the class. They would be the ones choosing the big ideas to focus on. After the class selected the big idea to work on, they would be the ones finding sources for their ideas and things that they get inspiration from that would tie into the big idea. Something that I tell the students now is that art cannot be made in a vacuum; artists need influences to help with the process. As a result, I would instead take a more facilitative role bringing in the technical know-how and investigative qualities in order to provide depth and complexity to the big idea. This was the turning point that I needed to create a more process-oriented curriculum.

Because this way of teaching was new and exploratory for me, I enlisted the help of three students that allowed me to interview them regarding the changes I was making.

The students that were part of my interview are ones who have taken my class before my implementation of big ideas and emphasis on the process of artmaking, as well as after the change.

Lesson and Unit Plan Development

I started by showing a presentation to the students to help them understand the concept of big ideas. I used both contemporary and historical artists as references, showing how their work uses a big idea. I ultimately narrowed the list of big ideas down to 12. Knowing that I would be using Art21 as one of my resources, those big ideas were directly correlated to the themes used in the series. Together as a class we went over the list, which had explanations on what the big idea was about. I told the students that they were going to be the ones to choose the direction of the class. In groups, the students discussed and chose their top three big ideas they would like to learn about and base their artworks on. The lists were compiled on the board in the front of the class. The majority of the class decided on fantasy, power, humor, and stories as the focus for our class. The ability of choice went over well with the students, as Lucas comments, “I liked that the class gets to choose the big idea to work with. It’s great because we can have our own opinion on it, we got to tell you what we want to do.” Even though I would have frequent ‘check-ins’ with the students, this new approach would rely heavily on them to be and remain heavily self-engaged with their work. However, as I found with even with students who normally didn’t turn in any assignments, when we started using big ideas

this wasn't the case. As Klein-Young writes, "this gives them something to look forward to. It gives them a motive to be in school".²

In addition, to help familiarize the process-oriented approach to the students, I created a packet outlining my expectations for them and how they would be graded. The emphasis of the grade would rely on their sketchbook/preliminary work, followed by their final artwork, as well as a descriptive analysis and reflection of their completed artwork.

One of the components of the process-approach involves the collection of items of inspiration. This includes anything that influences the student and can help them towards creating their final artwork. Examples were given such as personal history, artwork they've seen, photographs, magazines, things they saw on television, something on the internet, advertisements, an item of clothing, objects in their house, something on their walk to school, objects in nature, events they've attended, personal interests, and so on. I wanted the students to have at least 10 items they could draw inspiration from and possibly use towards an artwork by the end of the first week. Predicting that I might have issues with students forgetting to bring items in, for the first few days, I set aside time specifically to allow students to browse my art library and be comfortable with using it. The art library was something that I created as a result of the process-oriented approach. Up until this point, I had kept my art books and magazines in my storage room away from the students. With some exceptions, the students did not really use them nor know about them. In addition to the books and magazines that were already in my classroom, I also brought in my collections of books and art magazines such as *Juxtapoz* and *ArtNews*

² Klein-Young, 4

of which some had to be edited down. Much like a library catalog, I created an organization system for the books and magazines to allow the students to easily find what they were looking for. Students were given Post-It notes to write their names on and then be placed on a page if they wanted a reproduction of an image. The library ended up, and continues to be a real success. Students can use it if they get stuck and have lack of ideas. In addition, it helped with the problem of only having one computer in my classroom. Now, if a student has questions about a particular area, I'm familiar enough with the content in my library that I can direct them to a source in the library. Using both my resources and the students prior knowledge really paid off, as Lucas remarks, "I like finding inspirational items to use for an artwork. I'm always thinking about it." Reinforcement from students like that, reminds me know that they are constantly thinking about ideas both inside and outside school.

Another process component involves the sketches of their ideas. Initially, students are to complete at least two preliminary sketches detailing their idea. I also have the students create an additional sketch that uses a drawing command to make them think differently about their idea. One part of the packet that students received has a page dedicated to 12 different types of drawing commands and explanation about how to use those commands. Many of the students find this approach very helpful, with Lucas commenting, "It's hard because sometimes after I come up with my first sketch, that's the only way I'll think about it. But then I'll do the drawing command and it makes me think about it differently. I'll sometimes do more than one because I like to the way they come out."

Peer feedback, or a post-peer share sketch, is another preliminary method the students had to account for. On a one-on-one or small group setting, students would share their ideas and sketches with others in the class. In this small-setting format, even the most timid students feel comfortable enough to share with one another. Hearing how other students have come up with their ideas and translated it into a sketch, is a valuable learning process for both parties. The other student gives the sharing student at least three ways that they interpret their idea and asks them at least three questions that they are unclear or concerned about. A sketch will then be created after taking in account the advice and direction that their peer has given them and apply it towards their original idea.

The final process component involves students writing about their process in creating their artwork, as well as a final reflection. The students would be writing notes regarding their thoughts and direction in their various sketches. For the peer-share, they write about the questions and interpretations that their peer gave them and how it has changed their thinking. As Barrett writes, “Critics and viewers benefit from this experience if they learn that they can decipher another’s meaning by looking carefully at art objects and thinking about what they mean”.³ Peer feedback is an important elements in Hannah’s eyes, “I like the peer share because I like telling people about my work, but I also like hearing what their work is about. I like seeing how other people use the same big idea but do it differently.” Finally they are given various prompts, which may or may not be used towards a final descriptive analysis and reflection. Formal grammar and

³ Barrett, 53-54

punctuation is emphasized in this reflection. A page in the packet lays out various art-related terms and alternatives to them, much like a thesaurus.

Teaching Practices

The use of the *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century* videos played an important role in adapting the big ideas. The artists were already categorized by a big idea and came from a rich, diverse background. To go along with the introduction of a new big idea for each project, a new Art21 artist was introduced and learned about each day. Students have a descriptive handout showing the artist's work, their process, and detailing their background. During the film they would write down notes about certain things that interested them or ways to think about their art differently. The artists were eventually compared and contrasted with one another, as well as other historical artists, cultures, and artists that work within a particular medium.

Using my own knowledge base and Sydney Walker's, "A Starter List of Big Ideas and Artists"⁴, the students are enriched with many more relevant artists than before. I was unsure how the students would adapt and if they would accept some of the non-traditional ways of artmaking found in the films. However according to the students I interviewed, they found them very useful. Lucas remarks, "The warm-ups show us how artists do the big ideas and it's neat because they are all different." Leer comments that "I like watching the artists in the video warm-ups and taking notes and stuff cause that really helps me get ideas."

⁴ Walker, 140

Student Work

The artwork that has been produced and the experiences the students have gained in my class are greater than before. The students are far more invested and connected with their artwork. Hannah comments, “I think people are basing their artwork more off their feelings.” Leer agrees with that, “It’s more connected because you get to choose what to do. I’m more into my work now.” Lucas also adds, “I feel more connected. I like having my own opinion on it and to do my own thing.” With empowering students with personal choice, there has been a greater investment and more pride taken towards their artwork.

Despite preconceived notions that the students might reject this new style, I was relieved to find that their reaction was quite the opposite. As I discovered during the interviews, students were enjoying the open-endedness and ability of choice. Such is the case with Hannah, “I like it now, like, we have more freedom. It’s more based on our ideas and not yours.” Leer talks about the fact that this new method was more of a challenge for her, “it’s kind of hard because I have to think of my own ideas. Before it was easier.”

More than ever, students are writing a deeper and more meaningful description about their own artwork. Because students are spending more time on the process and we are doing activities that enhance the development of their idea, students are making artwork that deals with the complexities that effect their lives. Here in an excerpt from Kinley’s descriptive analysis where he addresses those areas, “Everyone is stressing the concept of peace but we aren’t doing much to stop violence. This is related to our theme

of power because it is easy to gain power through the use of violence. If we are facing a problem like genocide we should try to fix it no matter which part of the world it is.”

Physical Environment

While I was finding successes with the new approach, I did have some areas that need changing in my eyes. Early on, while explaining the concept of big ideas, I would like to have had the exercise become more active. For example, following an initial introduction of big ideas to the students, I would like to have the students try and figure out an artist’s big idea. The writing portions received the biggest complaint from the students. Not wanting to change my approach and just dismiss their grief, we made a pro and con list on the board. After all of the sides were given, the value of the pro far outweighed the con. I am experimenting with other alternatives such as blogs and podcasts that would be used in tandem with their artwork but still contain a grammar component.

The emphasis on technique and the choice of media is an area that I am still trying to reflect upon further. Currently, I primarily choose the general media that the students will be using on the big idea. This goes against my whole student-centered approach. Because the course is only a semester long, I would rather not repeat any of the materials used as we work with each new big idea. I am finding that this is usually the case, that students are ready to explore a new medium. I want the students to come out of the class with a breadth of art knowledge. I do have a very small amount of students who feel more comfortable in one medium or another and who are hesitant going beyond that. As of now, I require them to stay within the medium of the general class. Even though I choose

the media, the students are still given various options within that. For example, rather than limiting the material to drawing, I give them the several 2-D options. Students may choose to incorporate drawing, painting, watercolor, colored pencil, or any combination. When we focus on printmaking, the students may choose silk-screening, block printing, image transferring, monoprints, or a combination of them. To try and build up their skill in these materials, I will do demonstrations specific to each medium and have them take notes and do specific exercises and activities that can assist them. Students are shown specific artworks that fall within each medium so that they can get a feel for what their completed artwork might look like. If they decide they would like to use that material to express their big idea then I have a demonstration of the medium for those specific students. With class sizes upwards of 30 students, normally I might feel hesitant to working with a sometimes small, select group of students while the rest of the students are left on their own. However as I found, the other students are engaged independently because of the process-oriented format. Issues such as behavior and staying on task are not really an issue. My other concern is whether or not every student should see every demonstration, regardless of if they choose to use it or not. I'm not sure if having the students view artworks within that medium enough for them to decide. Ultimately, as of now, I am leaving the decision up to the students.

Another area that I will be looking into further is finding a balance between creative expression and formal composition. While I emphasize to the students that the majority of their grade is reliant on the process, there is a portion that still deals with their final product. Usually when the students are going over their sketches with me is when I talk to them individually about their composition. I want to provide constructive feedback

when at all possible, but also don't want to give them too much alteration to their original idea. I realize that they do need guidance in this area, but it is a fine line because I don't want to have too much of my own influence on their work. One way I like to make it so I don't have too much influence is, if the student allows it, to display their sketch using the document camera. We can then talk about more formal elements as a class, and students can be the ones giving feedback. I would step back and take the facilitator role and guide the conversation and recap and give my own opinion after the students have exhausted theirs. As of now, I am comfortable with the balance of this approach.

For most art teachers, a component of their job is to display their student work around the school. I am no exception. Many of my past projects resulted in the end product looking very similar to one another. The range of creativity was not there because I was directing the lesson. The students would all follow the same process and as a result they would all resemble one another. One could say that this way of teaching was safe. Although they were similar, visually speaking, it was all work that was pleasant to the eye. My school was accustomed to the types of projects that I have my students do. The work always received compliments, but in the back of my mind I knew the work did not have much substance beyond being pleasant to look at. I am very confident with where I stand at my school and would have no problem defending this change in style if an issue were to arise. However, after displaying the work, I found no hostility or negativity towards the new work. Rather I continued to receive compliments on the work displayed. With this new body of work, I was able to actually include what the students themselves wrote about their work. Because my past projects lacked any sense of meaning or purpose beyond the production itself, this was not something that I did. Their

previous writings mostly focused on the formal elements of their artwork, because that is mostly what it stood for. Many of these new compliments were directed towards the meaning and why the students chose to communicate that message.

Conclusion

By using a process-emphasized method in designing my curriculum, it allowed me to approach art with a different lens. I became more comfortable with reaching out to the students with artists that may not exactly fit into the media we were working with. Before I would keep a separation of, for example, a two-dimensional artist from a three-dimensional artist. However now with an emphasis on the process, I did not find a need to separate those boundaries. By introducing different ways of how an artist creates their work, it opens up more possibilities for having students learn to create their own as well. As Hannah told me, this approach helped her to get ideas. In a sense, introducing the possible ways that one can approach art can be a form of differentiated instruction. Not every student is going to understand art and come up with ideas the same way. By showing how a variety of artists create, students can learn techniques that can best help them. Some students need more peer feedback, or need more visual stimulus, while others need more time to sketch. Seeing that there is not one correct way, students are more comfortable with themselves. This was a positive unexpected result that I had not thought about happening prior to my teaching experience.

Having the students involved from first day was probably the biggest catalyst for change. In relying on them to direct the class and relinquish control from me was a big step forward. Until that actually happened, my mindset never really grasped the concept

of a process-oriented classroom. Where artists got their ideas and how they got them, was not as important before. The change has resulted in a more enriched, animated classroom for both the students and the teacher.

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AE 700: Issues in Art Education
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Content and Purpose

The *Issues in Art Education* course was my first introduction into teaching with big ideas. Big ideas are topics that have long been used by artists over time. They are broad enough that each individual has a different interpretation and experience with it, thus will connect with each big idea differently. The course emphasized the importance of combining the student's personal life with the artistic process. Over the course of the class, we began to examine our own practice. We were to reflect and implement ways to improve what we were teaching and how we were teaching it.

The course also introduced us to the PBS series *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Like in the past, artists today are creating art based on their personal experiences. The Art21 series follows contemporary artists and delivers the content from the perspective of the artists themselves. The artists provide a continuous narrative, dialoguing every step they take in the artmaking process. We discover the purpose behind their art and how they develop and execute their ideas. During the course, we examined the artists Alfredo Jarr, Laylah Ali, and Judy Pfaff. We focused on understanding the purpose, big ideas, and artistic practices of each artist. By addressing those specific areas, we begin to understand the process in which the artist works. The goal is to parallel the student learning in our classroom with the artistic process.

When we first watched the artists in class, it was difficult for me to find a connection of how I would use it in the classroom. It seemed to be just another visual resource. I was still looking at it through the lens of teaching in the more traditional style that I was accustomed to. The connection did not occur until I began to examine those same artists through the incorporation of big ideas.

Beliefs and Values

Before I started the masters program, the lessons that I taught were often very superficial. The artwork the student's produced was visually pleasing but lacked any kind of depth. A typical lesson would revolve around a particular artist or style, and the students would create an artwork extremely similar to that. It left little room for expanding their creative expression beyond the original artist's work. However, as I began to learn, the "goal is to not mimic an artist's work or hold it up as a standard, but rather emulate the types of thinking processes and personal investment that render professional artmaking as a meaning making endeavor."⁵ I would be naïve to think my students were thinking creatively as so the arts always boast. This was the style of teaching I was taught while I was in school and so I continued it. When I was in high school, I distinctly remember being frustrated because of the lack of freedom that my art teacher gave us. I found it ironic that I too fell in that groove of limiting a student's creativity. The introduction to big ideas changed how I would look at my teaching. As Olivia Gude writes, I fell in the same trap of relying on my prior education as training "rather than reflecting on the reality of contemporary art and own understandings of contemporary culture."⁶ I was not teaching with my surroundings in mind, thus not incorporating an important part of the artmaking process into the curriculum.

As I continued to re-visit *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* and the articles from the course, more and more things began to 'click' for me. Integrating student feedback into the curriculum was a key piece that was missing in my instruction. Allowing students to chose the direction and help guide the course enhances their connection to the

⁵ Walker 194

⁶ Gude 1

art being made in class. As I found, my students were more engaged and involved in their artmaking when they got to address issues relevant to them. The introduction of a wide variety of contemporary artists also played a significant role. The differing approaches and processes one takes as an artist marveled my students.

While working with the big idea of ‘power’, students were exposed to the meticulous approach Laylah Ali takes to create her emotionally tense gouache paintings. They were amazed with her extensive collection of newspaper cut-outs and her attentiveness to the minor variations of the pose of a person. Even though her work uses colors that can be bright and cheery, the content can often have a subtle, violent undertone to it. Students compared and contrasted her process to the work of Cai Guo-Qiang. Students immediately noticed that despite all the planning, Qiang’s explosions could not be completely controlled and predicted. However, they also understood that this was a symbolic measure going against the artistic traditions found in China. With his work *Inopportune: Stage Two*, students were shocked with the amount of emotion that could be evoked from looking at an artwork. Although the style and medium were different between the two artists, students understood the necessity of properly planning out their idea in order to convey the most powerful message.

Having the students actually think like an artist is a new way of teaching for me. In a past conversation with students, one of their concerns with art is that they have no idea what to create art about. A key aspect of artmaking needs to involve the student’s personal life. It is my role to facilitate students in getting to that mindset. An activity that I now use at the beginning of every semester, allows students to get into an artist mindset.

First individually, then as a class, we develop a web-diagram detailing all of the outside experiences that allow an artist to initiate an idea that can be used towards an artwork.

On the middle of a giant whiteboard I wrote the question ‘How do artists get their ideas?’ and circle it. Students had responses such as ‘memories’, ‘history’, ‘dreams’, ‘where they live’, ‘other artists’, ‘music’, and ‘nature’. We then examined each of those main categories further. Branching off from ‘memories’ were words like ‘positive’, ‘negative’, ‘childhood’, ‘with family’, and ‘with friends’. This activity continued with multiple parts branching off from one another, until the board was completely filled with student responses. I erased the initial question and in its place wrote, ‘How will you get your ideas?’. When students see the completed list in front of them, it becomes less daunting. A full week is spent exploring their ideas to create a concrete, individual knowledge base. As Walker states, “students need an adequate knowledge for artmaking if their exploration and expression of ideas is to be substantive and complex.”⁷ This is an ever-growing collection of ideas that students will return back to and incorporate as big ideas are explored throughout the semester. In addition of drawing from their own ideas, students are using a class library to explore artists that influence them. Upon seeing certain artists, styles, or cultures that they are drawn to, I am able to recommend additional resources to them. After the first week, the students have over a dozen influential resources to return to. This collection is constantly growing and expanding with the incorporation of new big ideas. I feel it necessary for the students to have a solid groundwork of ideas to draw from. The Art21 artists also show students their process in gathering ideas. An eighth grade student Hannah comments, “Laylah Ali made me think

⁷ Walker 37

differently about how I can do my art and how to get my ideas. She spent so much time just researching, and cutting out pictures, and organizing them. I admire that.”

Lesson and Unit Plan Development

An early attempt of mine to incorporate big ideas lacked both the student involvement and process elements. For one of my middle school classes, I chose the big idea of ‘heroes’ for them. By not allowing the students to be involved in their education, it caused some students to be disinterested in it from the beginning. I focused on covering the artists Kehinde Wiley and Shepard Fairey. Although neither artist particularly works under the big idea of heroes, I saw a connection because of their work in portraiture. As a class we addressed conceptual questions surrounding heroes and each student developed their own definition of what a hero could be. Rather than having students create a knowledge base and explore their hero further, students instead simply brought an image of their hero. Thus their knowledge based remained very superficial and I made the mistake of trying to “move quickly to the artmaking process.” As Walker goes on to say, “students will soon lose interest because they have brought little in the way of knowledge to inform their artmaking.”⁸ Preliminary drawings and explorations were not part of the process I had the students go through. Looking back, a good drawing command that I could of emphasized was symbolism. This would allow the students to think of ways to represent their hero beyond using just their image. Students had the option of adapt or “mimic” their work to fit with the style of either Shepard Fairey’s or Kehinde Wiley’s. The only student input would be to choose either a more pattern-based background

⁸ Walker 47

surrounding their hero or a more posterized hero with text. Any sort of adaption to allow a student's own input and style into the artwork was lost. Not only did the artist's not necessarily fit with the big idea, but the process of having the students research and develop an artwork was very shallow.

Since then I have completely changed the way I begin a lesson and how my class is generally structured. As I have developed a more comprehensive use of big ideas, I needed to address how the student work would be assessed. As I placed more emphasis on the process and reflection, students know that these areas are also weighed more heavily in terms of their grade than the actual work that is produced. As a result, the ways in which I assess student learning went through a significant change. At the beginning of each big idea, students are now given each a copy of the criteria from which they will be graded. This reaffirms to the student that I place a focus on the their process of artmaking. Prior to this, my assessments consisted of a general criteria that was written on the board at the beginning of the project. My assumption was that I did not want to overwhelm the students, but as I learned instead, the "assessment criteria should not be hidden from students."⁹ Students have the right to know and be aware at the beginning of the lesson how they are going to be scored. I focused my assessment and criteria into five categories: preparation, concept, aesthetics/craftsmanship, work habits, and their reflection.

For a student's grade in preparation, they have to show that they researched their idea and develop items that can be used to inspire them in creating their artwork. The ideas they come up with and develop are planned out with sketches and notes. An

⁹ Walker 110

effective strategy that I learned about in the course and tied in with the preparation was the use of drawing commands. During the preparation, I have the students utilize one or more drawing commands to alter their ideas. This was something that I had never utilized in my classroom. My students widely accept this approach in encouraging them to think differently and give them powerful new ideas. During their planning stages, the students have to share their ideas with other students. They are motivated to write down notes and do an additional sketch from the other students' perspectives. In addition to looking at the process, I also evaluate how effective a student uses their class time towards their preparation.

Another form of assessment relates to the student's concept. This involves the student's personal relevance and investment to the artwork. Although various knowledge-building activities are done during this time to enhance their involvement into the work, those items are graded separately. The concept addresses how far the big idea is incorporated and how original it is. Emphasis is also placed on how they use items such as personal history, artwork, photographs, things they saw on television, advertisements, objects in nature, events they have attended, and personal interests, for inspiration. After gathering these sources students must develop them further and creatively alter them, rather than simply copying them.

The aesthetics/craftsmanship is the one area of assessment that addresses the formal aspects of the artwork. In the past the majority of students' grades would be on focused on this area. For these criteria, students are graded on how well they manipulate the media and use the elements of art and principles of design to form a successful composition. The student's attention to detail is another area touched upon.

A common, yet important, form of assessment incorporates a student's work habits. This aspect shows the commitment to the project and speaks to their behavior and attitude. One part of a student's process involves the participation of issuing feedback to other students. Following the examination of the student's notes and sketches, the students are encouraged give a thorough response. The purpose of this not only improves how they examine artworks and look for clues into the meaning, but also improves their dialogue of art with one another. As a result, the grading reflects how cooperative and generous the students are with their discussions and feedback.

The final form of assessment involves a written reflection. I place more emphasis and provide the students with more tools to develop a strong understanding of self, than I ever have before. For their reflection, I look for the students to discuss not only the content of their artwork but the meaning behind it as well. I go over several reflection examples with the students, which we discuss the quality of the writing and how well it explains what the artwork is about and why it is significant. Students are provided with vocabulary wordlists to assist them in enriching their writings. All of this emphasis allows the students to develop a deeper reflective meaning not only about their artwork, but about themselves as well.

Teaching Practices

By using ideas and a process-oriented approach, it changed the way I have my students write about their work. I have always incorporated writing elements into my class. However, the artwork the students created before was mostly from teacher-generated ideas, rather than student-generated. The direction of the lesson was the way I

envisioned it to be, thus the artwork results were often very similar in style. The lessons were not structured to allow much student creativity within the project itself. In a sense, it was very constricting in how the students thought about their own work. As a result, the writing portions of the class could not really focus on the creative aspects of the project. The students could not write about how they came to an idea because the idea was already given to them. Instead, I had the students focus on the formal elements of the work. As I go back and re-read some of the writing samples, it makes more sense now how an area like craftsmanship can be utterly meaningless to some students. After incorporating big ideas into my curriculum, students are finally thinking for themselves and creating their own original artworks. The result in this change produces a much different writing sample. They can now comment about the process in creating their artwork and the meaning behind it. The writing develops into a much richer reflective experience. It specifically addresses their own self-generated ideas.

The critiquing process is an additional area that needed improvement in my class. Using big ideas provided me a good opportunity to make this change. As I mentioned before, the writing samples that students were completing in my class up to this point were based on formalist qualities. Now, when students look at their peer's artwork, they look beyond the surface and into the meaning. On the back of the reflection paper, there is an area for their peer to comment and interpret the artwork and the preliminary sketches. I tell the students that they are to take the position of a detective. Based on what the student gathered from their peers' sketches, images, and notes, they explored the meaning and trends behind their work. The paper was returned to the student where they had a chance to comment based upon what their peers wrote about their notebooks. The

students were very successful at explaining what they saw and drawing a conclusion to what they think it means. I felt a huge sigh of relief as students were actually ‘getting it’. After one of the writings Jasmine commented, “I really like figuring out the meaning of someone else’s art. It makes me think different about my own work too and gives me new ideas.” My critiques in the past always dwelled on the surface of an artwork, and students would discuss the elements and principles in relation to the work. Now students are looking past the exterior and looking for a deeper seeded meaning that lies within. Once again, this is one of many areas that got overhauled and changed in how I teach it.

Another emphasis of the course was the integration of visual culture into the classroom. While I always have incorporated some forms of visual culture into my classroom, they were always used as a standalone presentation and the context was covered very superficially. As I started using big ideas, I found ways to use those exact same examples but instead integrate them with a big idea. For example, Sony Bravia produced a stop-motion commercial called ‘Play-Doh’. The commercial uses hundreds of brightly colored plasticine rabbits that eventually collide to form one giant rabbit in a plaza in New York City. Before, I would show the students the clip and we would discuss the relevance of it and their opinion of it. Now, I was able to show it and use it when my students are working with ‘fantasy’ as their big idea. Having that big idea to guide me, I was able to explore more into the commercial. It became more relevant to talk about how the fantasy of colorful rabbits can be used to sell televisions and how it influences them. We talked about who the ad was directed towards, its effectiveness, a fantasy object they would like to see animated, and how they define themselves as consumers. By posing better questions, I am able to facilitate a more dynamic discussion for students so that

they can “be given a chance to reflect on, and respond to, the challenges of living in a culture undergird by consumerism and saturated by imagery.”¹⁰

Student Work

I am still working to fully integrate and develop my entire art program into using big ideas. Since I teach the entire school, grades first through eighth, I felt reluctant to integrate big ideas into all my classes at once. I knew this was not a small undertaking, and that I needed proper time in developing a thorough knowledge base of the artists and the big ideas. Initially my major focus was addressing my middle school classes, which I have done. Following that, I would begin to implement big ideas into my elementary classes. Because I teach the middle school students’ everyday, as opposed to the elementary students only once a week, I felt that I would be able to get more instant and direct feedback from the middle school students. For people who have taught middle school students, they are fully aware that these students have little trouble speaking their minds. That fact also played in favor of me. It was easier to exchange dialogues with the students and explore how their experience in art can be a meaningful one. Students spoke to their interests and I listened. This resulted in a student-developed layout of the big ideas they find the most interesting and wish to further explore.

I have received overwhelmingly positive reviews and feedback from the students since the inception of big ideas into my curriculum. Leer, an eighth grade student, describes her experience in my class before as being “kind of restricting” and “it’s what you want us to do.” Leer goes on to say, “Ever since we started using big ideas I feel

¹⁰ Duncum 25

more of a part of the class. I like that we get to choose what we want to learn.” Miguel, a seventh grader comments, “I feel more proud of my work than before because it wasn’t easy, but it’s mine. I had to really think about it. No one else has ever created what I just did.”

One of the middle school classes chose ‘power’ as their first big idea to work with. Over the course of a few days, the students focused on examining the artists Cai Guo-Chang, Ida Appelbroog, and Laylah Ali. Daniel, an eighth grade student wrote, “I never knew artist’s like that existed. They all do really different things but I can see how they are connected.” He goes on to say, “It gives me many more ideas and I feel more comfortable with using more symbolism in my artwork, it doesn’t have to be something from real life.”

Students also addressed that some of their difficulties in art revolve around being able to draw objects in a realistic style. As a class, we discussed options to help them achieve this goal. We decided that every Friday at the beginning of class, we would do an observational drawing where areas like proportion and shading are emphasized. Keeping the question of ‘How do I make this meaningful?’ in my head, students had to bring in objects that were of interest of them to draw. The completed drawings would be shared and students would be able to talk about why they chose that object. By doing this, it gives the classroom a much more personalized atmosphere where students learn more about one another and feel more connected. This approach differs from what I had done in the past. I would always place a box of miscellaneous items out on the table and the students would select an item from it. At the end of the year, the drawings would often

get discarded after being checked off because the students had no personal attachment with any of the items.

As I began to get more and more comfortable with teaching big ideas at the middle school level, I started attempting it with the elementary classes. The approach I took would be a more simplified form but was still similar to how things are done with my middle school students. With the elementary classes, I started with a discussion of what makes someone an artist. This led to explore the questions ‘Why artists create art?’ and ‘Where do artists get their ideas?’ Helping students to understand the concept of art is something that I never really thought addressing before. I had to actually help to develop their knowledge base from starting at the beginning. It was not until I started using big ideas, that I saw the importance of introducing and teaching the artistic process and meaning of an artwork.

Physical Environment

Initially, there was a lack of connection for me between the Art21 artists and big ideas. I thought of them as two separate entities. Even though we examined artists from this series in class, I was unsure how to go about using them without repeating my same mistakes. It was not until I began to use the educator guides that accompany each series that I began to see the relation between the two. In a sense, it was my own personal pride that I had to overcome in using the guides. I saw this as a form of cheating and was reluctant to use these resources. I was stubborn enough to feel that I must ‘reinvent the wheel’ and create a guide myself. Some of that reluctance also stemmed from my experience with other educator guides that I have read. I have found that the majority of

these resources have the teachers use a formalist style as their model. That is the exact opposite of how I was being taught in the course, as well as how I am now teaching. Such is not the case with the Art21 resources. The guides not only helped me get background on the artists, but because the series is grouped by themes, it also showed how certain artists work under the same big idea. The guides assist with activities and questions that will work with the students in developing their knowledge base. The questions are phrased to look past the surface of the artworks and into the meaning. The videos show how each artist has their own unique process and that is reassuring to students. With standardizing testing so prevalent in the education system today, students are often taught one specific way of thinking. As a result, it can be difficult for some students to get past the ‘Is this right?’ mentality. These resources reaffirm my assurance to students when I tell them that there is no one correct way to reach to the end result. The journey is different for each artist as well as each student, and that is where much of the learning takes place.

I am still experimenting an appropriate ratio of the amount of artists to introduce with every new big idea. Obviously there is not an exact formula, as is the nature of teaching. However, I am concerned about the possible disinterest in the students if they are only introduced to one particular artist. I try and cover the depth of the big idea and then the breadth by using a few artists. I am trying to keep the students as engaged and interested as possible. Although they might not find personal relevance or connection with discussing one artist, I hope they find it with another. In my experiences so far, that has always been the case. As Walker writes, “including more than one artist in a unit is advantageous in that students will be able to compare different approaches to the big

idea.”¹¹ As I’ve found, many of my students have connected with the process or message of one artist and the medium of another artist.

Conclusion

There have been many changes in my teaching practice. Students are learning about different artists, creating multiple sketches in differing ways, and researching and developing their sources of inspiration. Culminating from that, they then execute their artistic process. With students experiencing the ups and downs of artmaking, this all results in a unique experience. The process and direction for one student can completely differ from one to another and there is genuine flexibility to allow that to take place. As Walker states, “if students internalize the process of exploring big ideas, using key artmaking strategies for exploration and meaning making, they can transfer this process to other big ideas, artists, artworks, and artmaking beyond the context of the art room.”¹² I feel comfortable now with saying that my classroom now expands on a student’s higher-level thinking and my students have a greater understanding about themselves.

¹¹ Walker 111

¹² Walker 112

Conclusion

The experience of exploring meaning-making has been a life-altering one for me. Throughout my training in art, both in high school and college, the emphasis was placed on the end product. I was taught to look at the formal qualities of the work. When it came to teaching, I kept that same approach and focused solely on teaching skill and technique. This was the only way I really knew to create art as well as teach art. The importance of the process of artmaking was not present in any of my prior education or training. For me to truly change as an educator, I had to have a complete abandon of all of my previous practices. As I experienced, big ideas are something that you have to be completely involved in. At first I tried to use big ideas as an add-on to my existing curriculum. This led to a shallow learning experience. By not fully employing the use of big ideas, the deeper meaning and personal connection would not be present in the students. Once I was able to acknowledge this and began using big ideas from day one, that was when true change happened for my students and me.

Beyond transforming me into a better teacher, the program has helped me have a more well-rounded appreciation of art. As a teacher you try and remove all of your own bias from the classroom and present all sides equally. My bias revolved around contemporary art. While I did incorporate many contemporary artists into my teaching prior to the program, they were artists that I was fond of and most fell artists fell into one particular genre. If a student was not a fan of those bodies of work, they could be completely disinterested in what I was teaching. I did not attempt to expand my own horizons of other artists because much of my impression of an artist revolved around what their work looked like. I would address much of the work I saw primarily on their

formal qualities because that was how I was instructed to look at art. I think of myself as having a keen eye and good taste of art, but as I now realize my opinion is biased and can be superficial. In becoming a good teacher, I need to overcome my own individual feelings. I had the approach that my opinion was the only one that mattered. It resulted with the students only receiving a very narrow perspective when it comes to contemporary art. Because I was used to only addressing the formal qualities of a work of art, I would often completely dismiss looking at the artist's statement. If I had no immediate positive reaction to their work, then I would disregard it. In a sense I had to retrain myself how to look at art.

Over time, the program helped me look beyond the work of art itself. This helps explain why I had a tough time connecting with some of the artists when I first shown the *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century* videos. I had not been looking at the class through a process-oriented approach. My bias was to show only artists who created aesthetically pleasing art to my eyes. It was easy for me to come to an immediate conclusion of whether or not I liked a work of art. I paid little attention to the process and instead focused on the end result. The books and articles read over the courses helped to emphasize with me the importance of including a wide genre of artists. More reinforcement of that occurred during the student interviews. It was a true eye opening experience to hear that the students enjoyed witnessing the variety of ways to create art. In seeing how artists like Do-Ho Suh transforms fabric, or how Cai Guo-Qiang incorporates gunpowder, students were able to expand their minds with the possibilities of art. Even if the end result produced was not to their liking, they were at least able to enhance their own artmaking by being informed of the process of these artists.

By altering my classroom into a process-oriented approach to art, I also had to adjust how I had students talk about art. The basic context of a critique was an area that I had to go through a process of unlearning. When talking about artwork, both as the teacher and student, I had always used Feldman's model of art criticism. The four-step process of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment was how I taught it. This model put little emphasis on the meaning of the work and was more focused on how well the elements and principles of art were used. During the program, I was introduced to alternative methods in critiquing artwork. Terry Barrett's model, which involves questions like 'What do you see?', 'What does it mean?', and 'How do you know?' are a much better fit when using big ideas. By using this model, my discussions were full of more enriching comments and were a lot more lively. I have found that when I look at teaching art through a meaning-based approach, it completely changed my personal teaching philosophy.

Sharing all of this knowledge with other teachers has been one of my next steps. Although I am the sole art teacher at my school site, I have art colleagues at the other three K-8 school sites. These are my team teachers that I collaborate with. We each bring our own ideas to the table, thus we all have different teaching styles. As a result, we teach different lessons at each site. Once a month, we will get together and share current projects and get feedback from one another. Over the past two years, during these meetings, I would share with them what I have been learning in the OSU courses. They have been extremely receptive and have always wanted to learn more. The work that my team members' students produce were much like the art my students produced before I entered into the Master's program. Rather than the student having flexibility, very often

the work would focus on imitating the teacher. They have been able to see me progress along through the program. By incorporating big ideas into my teaching practice, the other art teachers have seen the possibilities that can be reached in the art room. In turn, this has motivated my colleagues to learn more about this. While I am comfortable sharing my knowledge with them, I want to make sure that they also have a meaningful experience like this has been for me. As a result, using professional development funding, we ordered the series of Davis art education books to assist us with developing a more meaning-based curriculum. We just recently received the texts and we are all excited with incorporating the knowledge gained from them to further enhance our K-8 art program.

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