

CONNECTING THE DOTS:
ONE ART EDUCATOR'S JOURNEY INTO THEMATIC ART CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION

By

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	pg.6
Abstract.....	pg. 8
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	pg. 10
Population	
Statement of the Problem	
Limitations of the Study	
Significance of the Study	
Chapter 2: Supporting Literature.....	pg. 17
Teacher as Researcher	
Backwards Design for Curriculum Development	
Big Ideas and Essential Concepts	
Identity Issues in High School Art Education	
Chapter 3: Research Methodology.....	pg. 28
Curriculum Design as Research	
Action Research	
Narrative Research	
Research Design	
Chapter 4: Research Results.....	pg. 47
Setting the Stage	
Realm of Reflectivity	
Change	
Theory and Praxis	
Chapter 5: Narrative Summary	pg. 90

The Power of Reflection

Implications for the Future of Art Education

Essential Concepts Realized

Appendix A Student Course Evaluation Form.....	pg. 105
Appendix B Student Course Evaluation Response Percentages	pg. 108
Appendix C Student Reflection Examples	pg. 110
Appendix D Advanced Art Student Artwork Assessment sample	pg. 112
Appendix E 3D Design Student Self-Assessment	pg. 113
Appendix F Student Letter	pg. 114
Appendix G IRB Forms	pg. 115
Appendix H Principal Approval Form	pg. 117
Appendix I Parent Consent Form	pg. 118
Appendix J Student Assent Form	pg. 119
References	pg. 120
Biographical Sketch.....	pg. 127

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. PHS Fine Art Department	pg.49
Figure 2. The Artist And The Student Information Page	pg. 52
Figure 3. Detail From The Artist And The Student Information Page ...	pg. 53
Figure 4. 3D Design Student 'Layers Of Me' Artwork	pg. 54
Figure 5. Student In-Progress Artwork Sample	pg. 56
Figure 6. Student <i>Window Into My World</i> Artwork	pg. 57
Figure 7. Teacher Planner Detail	pg. 58
Figure 8. Teacher Planning Details From Journal	pg. 59
Figure 9. Detail Of Ghiberti's Gates Of Paradise	pg. 63
Figure 10. Example Of Power Point Content	pg. 64
Figure 11. Student "Stories Of Me" Project	pg. 65
Figure 12. 1st Quarter Group Brainstorming Detail	pg. 66
Figure 13. 3D Students Participating In Year Opening Tower Activity ...	pg. 74
Figure 14. The Abandoned First Project	pg. 75
Figure 15. 3D Student <i>Layers Of Me</i> Project	pg. 76
Figure 16. Student Sketchbook Page on Identity.....	pg. 80
Figure 17. Student Sketchbook Page	pg. 81
Figure 18. Advanced Art Self Portrait Examples	pg. 83
Figure 19. <i>The Deer and Me</i>	pg. 91
Figure 20. 3D Design Student Power Point Slide	pg. 92

Figure 21. <i>The Tree of Me</i>	pg. 94
Figure 22. Advanced Art Self Portrait (Evan)	pg. 96
Figure 23. Advanced Art Honors Self Portrait (Lauryn)	pg. 98
Figure 24. Detail of Lauryn's Self Portrait	pg. 99

Summary Of Capstone Project

**Presented to the College of Fine Arts of the University of Florida
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Degree of Master of Arts**

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By

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this teacher thinking study was to examine how one art educator discovered what she really needed to effectively design and implement a thematic art curriculum relevant to the 21st century high school learner. In my study I used action and narrative research methodologies to investigate my own teaching praxis and student engagement. This was done as I implemented my previously designed curriculum for a combined Advanced Art and Honors class and as I developed a curriculum for my 3D Design class. The work of art educational theorists and educators Duncum (1999, 2001, and 2002), Gude (2004, 2007, 2009, and 2010), Stewart & Walker (2005), Wallings (2006), Wiggins (1989), Wiggins & McTighe (2005) inform my research of curriculum design processes. My research

methodologies were informed by the writings of Degge (1982), Dick (1999), Delacruz (1991, 2011), Freedman (2004), Eisner (1984, 1987, 1994, 2001), McCormack (2001), May (1993), and Moen (2006).

My research examined my own teacher thinking and praxis in creating curriculum, delivering instruction and evaluating student engagement in learning throughout one school year in my high school art classroom setting. My inquiries and stories of my own praxis and thinking have been documented in this narrative paper. Discoveries made from the research are presented here as vignettes which illustrate three themes that emerged from this investigation. The three themes that will be discussed are: *dimensions of reflectivity, change, and the difference between theory and practice when it comes to the realities of teaching high school art in the 21st century.*

My capstone project illuminates the real world workings of a high school art program and one teacher's journey to making art learning more relevant and engaging for her students. The results of this inquiry into my teacher thinking and praxis, and my student engagement in learning were utilized to create an instructional resource web site, which I have designed as an archive of my work and as a resource for other art teachers. My website features lesson and unit plans, student art project examples, links to contemporary artists and thematic instructional resources based on the big idea of Identity in high school art curriculum (<http://www.wirtartalk.org>).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Key Words: *Art Education, High School Art Curriculum, Instruction, Identity, Theory, Praxis, Narrative Research, Qualitative, Action Research, Design, 21st Century Skills, , Thematic Instruction, Instructional Resources, Backwards Design*

In this Capstone project, I sought to understand the relationship between art curriculum design and curriculum implementation as it relates to what actually happens in my high school art classroom. I also considered what instructional and technological resources are needed to develop an engaging thematic art curriculum for a high school art course. Using action research protocols and narrative research methodologies I examined my curriculum, instructional methodologies, and student engagement in learning, as it unfolds in my 3D Design class and my combined Advanced Art and Honors class. I also looked at the question of what resources best serve my curricular goals. I took a critical look at the design of my current curriculum, methods of instruction and student engagement with that instruction to discover what is working and what needs to be restructured to better meet the learning needs of my evolving student population.

My research has three components that are addressed in the methodologies section of this proposal. The understandings gained from the research into my praxis, teacher resources, literature reviews and students' engagement in learning inform both this paper and the creation of a web based instructional resource centered on the theme of Identity. This web resource serves both as an online repository of my work, and as a resource for other art teachers seeking to implement an identity themed curriculum.

My research inquired into the development of curriculum that focused on personal and community identity in high school art education. There has been much research conducted on curriculum design methodologies in art education by educators and theorists philosophizing about how to best structure learning. However, there has not been much writing about curriculum design research published in traditional professional journals by practicing K-12 art teachers, as they find themselves working in the k-12 classroom and exploring how to best engage their students in learning. This highlights a need for more teachers to act also as researchers in art education. My own research provides a metaphorical window into the thinking, planning, instructing and reflecting world of the high school art teacher. This research includes:

- An exploration of the benefits and challenges of thematic art instruction
- Examination of the availability and use of teacher instructional resources in the design and implementation of thematic art instruction,
- Consideration of differences between curriculum as designed and as implemented
- A glimpse into the reality of what actually happens in the art classroom

The target population for the findings of this study includes high school art coordinators and teachers. Pre-service and current art teachers will be able to utilize my research and instructional web based resource guide in their own curriculum development process.

Population

This study took place at a mid size public high school (approximately 1400 students grades 9-12) in a small semi-rural community of approximately 28,000 residents in the Southeastern United States. Students from my 3D Design class and my combined Advanced Art, Honors class and Portfolio Development class, ranging in age of 16 to 19, were participants and informants in my research. Student interactions with me as their art teacher were studied to identify strengths and weaknesses of my curriculum design and instructional methodologies. I collected, analyzed and interpreted students' artwork, written reflections and self-evaluations of their learning to gauge my effectiveness in instruction as well as students' understandings of presented concepts.

As a high school art teacher I was interested in a curriculum that relates too the lives of teens. Through small and large group discussions and individual written reflections; my consenting students served as informants in discovering what makes a thematic curriculum engaging and relevant to the lives of teens. I obtained parental consent for their students to participate in this study. Student and parent choice in participation in no way affected their class standing.

Limitations Of The Study

My research was limited to the study of three of the six classes I taught during the academic year 2011-2012. Those classes included Advanced Art and Honors combined (AA&H), Portfolio Development (PD) and 3D Design (3D). The AA&H and PD classes were taught at the same time in the same classroom and included students performing at different levels of academic and artistic abilities. In addition to this class I also observed and documented my instructional practices and the curriculum design of my 3D class as it

unfolded over the course of one school year. This limitation narrowed the focus of my study to the construction and implementation of an *Identity* themed high school art curriculum.

Statement Of The Problem

There has not been enough published “in the field” research conducted by actual K-12 classroom art teachers concerning how to bridge the gap between curriculums as designed and as implemented when it comes to actual student engagement in instruction and learning (Delacruz, 1999). My problem as a high school Art teacher is creating and implementing an effective curriculum that continues to engage an ever-changing student population. My challenge is making my instruction relevant and meaningful to my current students and developing a curriculum that leaves room for their changing interests and artistic abilities. A contributing factor in making instruction relevant to the high school student is a lack of easily accessible visual and literary instructional resources. It is often a struggle to motivate and engage students that are sometimes apathetic, and often unwilling to find their own solutions to complex problems. Many art teachers, myself included, often become frustrated with being unsuccessful in getting students to become personally invested and involved in the processes of learning about and making art. This frustration has led me to believe that there is a gap between art educational theory and praxis which could be bridged by investigating the nature of one art teacher’s thinking and practice in an actual classroom.

As mentioned above, an important challenge in art education is making instruction relevant and meaningful to the contemporary learner. Visual and literary instructional resources need to be relatable to a student’s life in order for them to be

remotely interested in learning. For decades art textbooks were primary instructional resources used by both students and teachers of art. My pilot study on teacher views and uses of art textbooks indicated that although there are some great art textbooks on the market now, most art teachers do not use a textbook (Wirt, 2011). While in the past, some teachers may have relied on art textbooks for major elements of their instruction; most do not use them (Lampella, 1994). The reasons for this are vast, but some common explanations included lack of funding and outdated content, methodology or imagery. My own pilot study findings included observations that art textbooks books no longer engaged the teen reader, they do not included content relevant to contemporary instructional practices and 21st century skills, or the teachers opted to create their own instructional materials from their private collection and free internet sites (Wirt, 2011).

Without using an art textbook for the primary art content, it takes teachers a great deal of time searching for relevant contemporary content for their instruction and then planning for instruction. Without sufficient time to search for instructional resource materials, plan curriculum and instruction for multiple art classes at the same time, fulfill all other duties assigned by the school, and actually teach many teachers fall back into using old lessons. While the teacher may be struggling to present students with relevant instruction and meaningful learning opportunities, students are actively trying to connect the dots to find their own place in the world. The content of many art classes is often based on outdated fundamentals like formalism-elements and principles, rather than correlating with students' actual life (Gude, 2010). This disconnect does not encourage students to developed the higher order thinking skills necessary for success in the 21st

century. In my view, using outdated lessons and methodologies just to make it through the day detracts from engaging students in learning.

Significance Of The Study

It is my opinion that from the process of creating we learn and grow. In *Design for Inquiry, Instructional Theory, Research and Practice in Art Education* (1999) Delacruz states that "Art teachers' thinking, planning, decision making, and response to the conditions of teaching are important but undervalued aspects of their work" (p. 21). The act of teaching art is not an act at all. It is a process of learning, reflecting, implementing, assessing and staying current on theory, practice and the culture of their students. Without these processes, what is presented to students runs the risk of becoming irrelevant to them.

For most art teachers, ideas of what to teach or what art projects would be fun for students are easy to identify. What many people in the public at large may not understand is that the difficulties lie in knowing how to construct a curriculum that can adapt to the ever-changing needs and interests of the contemporary learner. A good curriculum is more about making a big idea relevant to the student's life so that he or she becomes personally invested in learning through art making, than it is a structure for art making that becomes an exercise in problem solving (Walker, 2001). Big ideas curricula are also about understanding how to adapt those big ideas to the current interests of the student population, and then designing learning opportunities that will enable students to construct their own knowledge (Stewart & Walker, 2005). A curriculum is a living document. It is not set in stone. It is a guide that must change as the population it serves changes.

What practitioners of high school art education need is more practical and easily accessible content to utilize in their curriculum development and instruction (Wirt, 2011). So many high school teachers are overloaded with responsibilities that there is little time to research and evaluate contemporary resources like art textbooks or artist websites. Art education theory that must be decoded and then translated into practice may not be as useful to the busy, demanding working conditions of the typical classroom art teacher. Therefore, I believe that the creation and publication of a real world art teacher created resource guide, based on the theme of Identity, may help current and pre-service art teachers in designing their own curriculum. My curriculum guide provides sample units of study that I have successfully implemented, thematic lessons, and links to online content teaching tactics. My research has identified instructional resources and unit planning techniques needed to create and implement a strong thematic art curriculum that engages the contemporary high school art student.

By critically investigating my own classroom praxis I sought to understand how to bridge the gap between curriculums as designed and curriculum as implemented. I used my research results to create web based instructional resource for teachers based on the theme of Identity. This site (wirtart.org) includes professional and teacher made instructional resources, art projects examples, historical and contemporary artist content, as well as links for further investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Key Terms: curriculum, backwards design, action research, narrative research, instruction, thematic instruction, big idea, essential concepts, high school art, dialogical, identity, high school, curriculum

“A productive discussion of education's aims must acknowledge that schools are established to serve both individuals and the larger society” (Nodding, 2005. p. 11)

This chapter will focus on selected literature about art curriculum construction utilizing the backwards design model. The backward design curriculum model focuses on big ideas and essential concepts as the scaffolding for instruction. The body of this review is broken down into three major sections: teacher as researcher, curriculum design, and identity in high school art education as a focus for instruction and learning in high school art classroom. Finally I provide a synthesis on how this literature informs and supports my current research.

It is my position that in order to engage students in learning a curriculum designer must first identify the learning goals and understand the interests and learning needs of the students for which the curriculum is being designed before curriculum planning can begin (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Using a central theme to unify all instruction within the curriculum will assist students making connections between their life and the learning content so that they may construct their own knowledge (Stewart & Walker, 2005).

Teacher As Researcher

Research is the process of collecting and analyzing volumes of statistical data that was collected through experimentation, observation, standardized test scores, and literature reviews. In other words, research is the action of an outsider looking in to gain a better understanding of some unknown phenomenon. In education however, the most useful research is participatory in nature. On this point I argue that more research needs to be done by teachers within their classroom. (Degge, 1982; May, 1993) More research into curriculum, context, student learning and evaluation needs to be conducted by practitioners in the field to add to the understanding of quality art education and advocacy (Zimmerman, 1998). The 2007-2010 NAEA Strategic Plan as presented in the 2009 NAEA Research Agenda: *Creating a Visual Arts Education Research Agenda for the 21st Century: Encouraging Individual and Collaborative Research* stipulated nine content areas in which more research is needed. Of those nine, my research goals fall within the categories of curriculum, context, student learning and evaluation.

As the practitioner in the classroom, my role is not only that of the art teacher, but it is also the active researcher seeking to understand the nature of teaching through investigation my own praxis. To understand the strengths and weaknesses of any curriculum, the teacher/researcher needs to critically evaluate the methods of instruction as they relate to the learning motivations and abilities of the students. This requires action research plan to be developed and conducted (Sigler, 2009). By conducting action research on the implementation of a yearlong curriculum based on the single big idea of identity, I investigate the difference between the curriculum design and its implementation.

Action and Narrative research methodologies are empirical forms of research used in the social sciences. In education, the researcher is the practitioner in the classroom inquiring into

their educational praxis. The teacher is the researcher and the participant in the research study. These two research methodologies will be address in the next chapter.

Curriculum As A Living Document

A curriculum should equip students with the ability to ask and answer essential questions, turn those questions into knowledge, apply that knowledge in real world situations, and develop high standards of craftsmanship in all that they do. There is a difference between curriculum and instruction. Curriculum is both what is taught and instruction is how it is taught (Delacruz, 1997). When it comes to curriculum design there are a variety of models available for teachers to consult when constructing their own curriculum. This literature review will explore the elements and benefits of Backwards Design as described by Stewart and Walker (2005) and by Wiggins and McTighe (2006). Utilizing a backwards design model for constructing curriculum directs educators to specify the desired understandings and learning outcomes prior to focusing on the content, methods of instruction and activities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

In order to establish the essential concepts students are to learn and understand in a backward design curriculum model, the teacher must first accumulate and organize their own instructional toolbox so that they are better able to engage their students in constructing their own knowledge. The teacher's toolbox houses their visual and instructional resource materials and their own personal content knowledge, which are the art educational tools of the trade. In backward design, all units of study are guided by an essential concept. An essential concept in a backward design model becomes a governing theme in the backward design curriculum when it is broad enough to present an entire school year's learning opportunities (Stewart & Walker, 2005). With this in mind, utilizing a theme to govern a school year's curriculum provides a focus for the gathering of appropriate visual and instructional resources. Thematic art instruction can

be beneficial to the learner if the teacher is prepared with content knowledge, instructional resources and instructional strategies appropriate to the level of art student in the class.

As I discovered in a previous study on teacher art textbook usage, the primary source of new instructional materials and content knowledge used by contemporary art teachers comes from what they themselves make from their personal collections and/or what they find on the web (Wirt, 2011). With the increase of social and professional networking web sites there is now considerably more available and easily accessible content material for teachers looking to gather free and appropriate art content imagery and information than there were even just five years ago. Teachers are becoming more active in building and sharing instructional resources by utilizing emerging digital web technologies to self publish their own work for other educators to utilize (Roland, 2005; Delacruz, 2009). For example, web sites like Delicious, Flicker and Pinterest are formatted in such a way that teachers can easily set up instructional resource sets to be shared with their students and colleagues without risking copyright infringement. Using sites such as these, teachers can make repositories of images or relevant websites for students to explore. These sites can be grouped by themes, artists, media, or any classification that is relevant to the contents of the stack. Art teachers such as Karissa Ferrell, Deborah Brock, and myself are now creating virtual contemporary art databases by selecting and curating the work and art contributions of current artists for use as instructional resources in a high school art setting. (Brock, 2012; Ferrell, 2012).

Backwards Design

Educators Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2006), in *Understanding by Design*, present teachers with a logical framework for creating meaningful learning units in a clear and organized manner that keeps the end result in mind. That framework is known as Backwards Design. This

curriculum design model utilizes questions to help the educator identify what is of most importance to teach, plan how it be taught, and how learning will be assessed. The process of asking and answering questions guides the teacher throughout the process of constructing curriculum. The framework of backward designs is constructed in three stages. The first stage is to identify the learning goals. The teacher must ask, what do I want my students to take away from this learning experience? Identifying what the students should know, understand, and be able to do is the starting point of this model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Eliot Eisner (2005) commented, "No decision is of greater importance than determining what to teach and towards what ends" (p. 8). Wiggins states in *The Futility of trying to Teach Everything of Importance* (1989), that the aim of curriculum is to awaken, not "stock" or "train" the mind." Rather, Wiggins argues that awakening that mind requires grabbing students' interest with topics of importance to them. For the purpose of this research I stipulate that the topic of importance to my students is their individual and community identity as explored and expressed in their art.

Once the desired results have been identified then determining what will be acceptable evidence of that learning is articulated in the second stage (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). At this stage the teacher must think like an assessor. The point of assessment is to measure and evaluate student leaning and instructional practice (Stewart & Walker, 2005). What to assess, and how to do it, is the ever-changing question asked by educators. Assessment is useful to both teachers and students. It helps both gauge their progress, level of understanding, and what they need to investigate further. "If students are to be active, involved learners, then they also need to be aware of where they are going and how they are progressing toward that goal" (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 95). This is where formative assessments play a big role in getting an idea of how the student is progressing towards their learning goal and giving the student an opportunity

to ask questions of the teacher to gain better understanding. If the teacher waits until there is a final product without explaining how these products will be graded the student could be way off target and discouraged about their art. “It is actually the awareness of the criteria, not engagement in the task itself that promotes such learning” (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 95). This reinforces the concept that giving students the assessment rubric prior to their assignment will help them better monitor and gauge their own progress.

Stewart and Walker (2005) offer a checklist for teachers to follow when designing assessments. This list details the steps as follows. 1. Identify the purpose of assessments. 2. Clarify what it is that you wish to assess. 3. Brainstorm ideas for possible ways in which students can demonstrate learning. 4. Select from the brainstorming list what will best serve this particular objective. Here readers get more specific questions to answer pertaining to performance tasks. 5. Determine criteria for assessment. 6. Create a rubric with delineates levels of achievement and share that with the students. 7. Assign a point’s scale for grading which relate to the levels set forth in #6 (p. 101-103).

There are multiples methods teachers can use to assess the effectiveness of their instruction and the progress of student learning. Formative and summative assessments are the two largest areas of assessment utilized by teachers. Formative assessment relates to the “judgments made during the implementation of a program that are directed toward modifying , learning, or improving the program before it is complete” (Stewart & Walker, 2005. p. 90). Teachers on a daily basis are doing this type of assessment, often unconsciously. Discussions with students as a group or individually, journal reviews and in-progress artwork reflections are methods of formative assessments that can be used to monitor student progress. The type of assessment is what the majority of school administrators are most interested in is the summative

assessment. This type of assessment is used at the completion of instructional units or school year. The purpose of summative assessments is to summarize what “students know and are able to do” (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 93). As teachers we want students to learn so we must utilize a systematic method of assessing their learning. The chosen assessment method has to be multidimensional for a true depiction of student learning. This is why both formative and summative assessment strategies should be used jointly in determining student learning.

With a clear understanding of what students are to learn, and how that learning will be assessed, the teacher has determined the starting and ending points on the map of learning. Wiggins and McTighe assert that "teaching is a means to an end" (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 19). What media techniques, artist and concepts will be taught to bring students to the point of being able to *do* and *understand* is the next set of questions to be answered. At this point the teacher must narrow the instructional focus to only those learning activities that will bring students to the desired new understandings. This reinforces the idea that everything of importance can't be taught (Wiggins, 1989). Teachers have to consider the time allowed, available supplies, and student interests.

Student interests are an important part of planning an effective art curriculum and must be considered by the teacher if there is going to be true engaged learning. Because these interests, and those of society as a whole, are in a constant state of change, so must be the curriculum. It is a living document in a constant state of change, just like our students.

Big Ideas and Essential Concepts

As part of the backwards design model is the establishment of big ideas. Big ideas are often referred to as themes or *enduring ideas* (Stewart & Walker, 2005). This is because in order for a big idea to be meaningful it must emerge from concepts "that have drawn the attention of

humans throughout the ages" (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 17). They have endured history. From the enduring ideas come specific key concepts and questions that build the scaffolding for instruction and student learning. It is the establishment of the overreaching *big idea* that guides all instruction, learning activates and assessments. This is why the use of big ideas in building curriculum fits directly into the backwards design model for curriculum design. "Sydney Walker and Michael Parson argue that focusing art curriculum around human issues does not relinquish what is valuable about the arts, but presents more of an opportunity to capitalize on exactly what makes art powerful and significant, their ability to convey the complexity and ambiguity of human values, beliefs, interpretations about life" (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 30). Skill and technique without meaningful application does not reflect the aims of an art education in the 21st century.

Curriculum designed around an essential concept, or theme, represents a philosophical commitment to linking academic content with "life-focused issues" (Stewart & Walker, 2005). Utilizing a central theme as the guiding light for curriculum design brings art instruction beyond just art making and into the creating of opportunities for students to learn "how artistic expression of humans throughout the world and over time has served a range of purposes within society" (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 8). The success of utilizing an essential concept to guide instruction and learning is partially dependent on that concept being relevant to the lives of the learners. Focusing instruction on concepts that are life centered will encourage student inquiry as a way of understanding ideas (Krug, 2003). This is an essential skill that promotes life long learning. However, if students are not personally connected to a big idea then the art making is relegated to a mere exercise in problem solving.

A function of art education is to liberate and empower the learner so they may utilize their skills for personal growth and social change, effectively communicate their point of view, provide equal opportunity for individual growth and expression, and cultivate critical thinkers who can question the so-called truths in our current system. A thematic approach to curriculum design provides a framework for instructional practices that will help students build bridges between concepts that are directly related to their own lives (Stewart & Walker, 2005). Nel Noddings points out that a democratic society is in a continual state of change and its citizens must have the critical thinking skills to be capable of making a contribution to the growth and development of their society (Nodding, 2005). Thematic art instruction can be beneficial to the learner if the teacher is prepared with content knowledge, instructional resources and strategies appropriate to the level of art student. The primary source of new instructional materials used by contemporary art teachers comes from what teachers make from their own content collections and what they find on the web (Wirt, 2011). With this in mind, utilizing a single theme to govern a school year's curriculum provides a focus for the teacher in the gathering of appropriate visual and instructional resources.

Identity In High School Art Education

It is a fictitious assumption to believe that any one person can exactly define identity. The concept of what identity is, and how it is constructed, is something that is in a continuous state of change. The task of the teacher in using *Identity* as a guiding theme for instruction is to help the student explore their own sense of identity through the study and creation of art. Problematizing this construct is that identity construction is not a single phenomenon, but one that is multi-layered and influenced by many factors. It is something that changes moment by moment, through an individual's experiences and over the span of their lifetime. Nevertheless, it is

important to know and explore how we perceive our own identity, the way in which is constructed and how we choose to express it. Cary (1998) writes “The tendencies of art and art education to open access to often obscure inner realities and meanings make it a valuable critical tool” (p. 35). Exploring the lives of artists, how they have expressed their identity throughout art history serves as a tool to construct and deconstruct our own identity.

Psychologists, theorists and philosophers have been debating the meaning of identity, and how it is developed for centuries. The one thing that most will agree on is that identity development is an ongoing process and is shaped by both internal and external changes in the life of an individual. In education, studies on identity have focused primarily on the intellectual and physical development of the child as they relate to expectations in the academic setting. However, studying the development of the individual is not the focus in my research. I am most interested in learning what my students think are the internal and external factors that contribute to the shaping of their identity and view of self.

Buschkohle wrote in *Freedom and dignity: Identity through creation* (2010) “Identity is not a question of awareness of the status quo, but a dynamic idea of a person who is constantly subject to a diversity of influences and is thus constantly changing” (p. 310). This diversity of influences and concept of continuous change is also a metaphor for the development of curriculum. For curriculum to be relevant to the contemporary learner it must include options to readjust to the needs and interests of the ever changing student population.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the methods employed in my research. This chapter is broken down into two major sections *Research Methodologies* and *Research Design*. The first will present the characteristics of the type of research methodologies I used and the second will explain how I used them. While I will reference my scholarly sources here, more in depth explanations of curriculum design utilizing the Backward Design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and thematic instruction using Big Ideas and Essential Concepts (Stewart & Walker, 2005) were addressed in the previous literature review chapter.

Curriculum Design Research

Paul Bolin (1996) observed, "Asking and answering questions is an essential part of what it means to be human" (p. 7). How can I design a more engaging curriculum for my students? This is a question that has repeated itself throughout my professional life and the lives of most educators. As an undergraduate I was educated under the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) philosophy for instruction that placed high emphasis on measurable goals, but did not exactly provide a structure for getting students to meeting those goals. Yet after more than a decade of teaching High School Art I came to realize that this structure was not creating an atmosphere of engagement and personal connection to the art making processes of my students. How can I get my students to become personally connected to the art they are learning about and creating? How can I make my instruction more relevant to their lives? After all, education is about the learner, not the teacher. These types of questions led me on a path to Backwards Design and the search for relevant big ideas.

Backwards Design

The concept of Backward Design presented by Wiggins and McTighe (2006) gives me a framework for developing curriculum that keeps the end result in mind. The first stage of the Backwards Design model directs me to identify the learning goals. I must ask myself, what do I want my students taking away from this learning experience? Identifying what the students should know, understand, and be able to do is the starting point of this model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). When identifying the desired learning goals I consult my district, state and national content standards for guidance. With that in mind, I also stipulate that there is more content that can be addressed within an instructional unit. I may want to "get it all in" but this can lead to more of a "coverage" approach to teaching unless clear priorities are first set (Wiggins and McTighe, 2006). Setting those priorities first will help guide the rest of the curriculum development process. What is it that I want my students to learn? This one little question is much larger than it appears. I want my students to inquire, to understand and to do many things along their educational path, but I can't teach everything. For the purpose of this research I will stipulate that a topic of high importance to my students is their individual and community identity.

Determining what will be considered acceptable evidence of that learning is articulated in the second stage of the backward design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The questioning starts all over again. How will I know that my students have learned? What will prove that they know? What is the evidence of understanding and proficiency? What assessment strategies will be utilized to document student learning? What will serve to prove that my students have gained new understandings? Can one type of assessment determine student learning and understanding? In art education we often state that we want our students to "understand" something. However,

understanding does not come from coverage of content. It comes from time and practice and digging under the surface of an idea or technique to discover its roots and possibilities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This is why I believe that having one theme for an entire year of instruction and learning is beneficial as it allows students to revisit important concepts throughout the entire school year.

At this stage I must think like an assessor. This does not come naturally to me or to many of my colleagues. Assessment in education has often been associated with end of unit-standardized test. Yet, art is not best assessed through a bubbled in multiple choice scantron sheets. This is not to say that there is no place for multiple-choice options on an art assessment. It means that qualitative assessments are often more applicable than quantitative assessments in high school art education. Assessments should not only identify what a student know or do, but also to recognize growth with in the student. Assessments help both students and teachers gauge their progress, level of understanding, and what may need to be investigated further, or revisited again. Self-reflection is an important part of assessment. I do not see assessment as an end point. Rather, it is more of a checkpoint along the path of learning.

I am assessing my students and myself on a daily basis in my classroom. This enables me to evaluate student progress, effectiveness of my current teaching methods and to recognize if I need to take a different approach with the group or an individual student. Making use of responsive evaluation techniques allows me, and my students, to discover the unforeseen learning opportunities that may not have been the goal of a particular lesson but are still valuable new bits of knowledge (Dunn, 1995). When students learn something that was unforeseen in the original instructional design it is then the teacher's responsibility to acknowledge that achievement and find a way to incorporate that into assessment.

Formative assessment is the primary method I use in daily assessments. Some techniques for assessing student learning along the way are teacher-made checklists of relevant techniques or skills, student self rating scales to evaluate their in-progress work, anecdotal records like journals and sketchbooks, informal oral or written student reflections of in-progress or completed work, and formal class critiques (Dunn, 1995). The difficulty with designing assessments is often finding the appropriate method at the appropriate time that is consistent with the overall learning goals.

Large and small group discussions are used to observe and gauge how students are grasping and applying information or concepts. Asking "why", "how" or "what do you think?" questions enabled me to see if a student was internalizing a concept and using it to construct their own knowledge. In these discussions I observed student participation. When I saw that a student was not participating in the discussion I would specifically ask them a question.

Individual teacher/student conferences helped me determine if a particular student needed more specific instruction or guidance. As students were working on a project I moved throughout the room to get to each student to discuss how they were utilizing a concept, media or technique in their art creation. Often this was just a quick chat, but there were situations where I needed to spend more time with an individual student. In my classes of 20-25 students I sometimes could not get to everyone in a single class period. I made note of which student I did get to conference with so that in the next class I could start with those I did not meet with previously.

Planning journals and work in progress reflections are two methods I used to assess students' problem solving strategies and to assist students in evaluating their own progress. Part of my curriculum was student journal keeping. In this journal students practiced the skills introduced for art creation, and to plan and reflect on their creations. By reviewing these journals

with students individually I was able to better guide them to their own discoveries and conclusions about the art they are making. At the midway point of artwork creation, students wrote a short reflection about their progress to that point and what they think they would need to do next. They also wrote how they were utilizing the specific concept or technique that was presented at the onset of the unit. At this point if a student was not where they need to be I could offer more specific direction.

At the end of a unit I used multiple types of summative assessments to collect evidence and document student growth and learning. Quizzes and tests were used to give students an opportunity to articulate what they knew and understood about the specific topic. These tests combined various formats like short answer, essay, and multiple choices or fill in the blank. They also fulfilled my division's requirement of giving a formal summative test. The content of the information and the desired learning outcome determined the style of test for a given unit of instruction. While I did give some written tests, they did not weigh as much as the final evaluation of an artwork.

I have found that many students are often better able to communicate what they know and understand about a concept or technique through the creation of original artwork. What is necessary for effective art assessment is a well-designed grading rubric. I gave students the grading rubric at the onset of their projects. This allowed them to self regulate and determine how they will meet the standards that had been set. When students know what they need to do they are better able to meet the end goal. The grading rubric was broken down into content specifics for each assignment and defines what is excellent (meets all goals and demonstrates high level of knowledge), good (meets most goals and demonstrates acquired knowledge), needs work (missing some information or technique, slight or no reference to material presented from

the unit instruction), and unacceptable (does not demonstrate knowledge of the concept, is incomplete or did not meet the standards presented at the beginning of the assignment). Along with the grading rubric for artwork creation there was a student written evaluation of their work. If they chose not to use something this also gives them the opportunity to justify why they did not. Sometimes that justification was essential in determining a higher level of understanding and transference of knowledge.

Articulating what is an acceptable demonstration of student knowledge guides the path of instruction. This is why the assessment criteria and strategies need to be designed prior to lesson design completion (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). As teachers we want students to learn so we have to have a method of assessing their learning. This assessment method has to be multidimensional for a true depiction of student learning. This is why I utilized both formative and summative assessment strategies in my classes.

“What prior knowledge do my students need to have before they can begin to strive for this new learning goal? This question led me to “how does the curriculum need to be designed to build upon skills so that higher learning and understanding can be reached? This opens up an entirely new design element. When trying to decide what will serve as evidence of learning I need to also think about what do my students need to construct their own new knowledge. This leads to the third element of backwards design, planning the learning experiences and instructional strategies (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

With a clear understanding of what I wanted students to learn and how I would assess that they have learned, I had determined the starting and ending points on the map. Now I just had to plot the course to get them there. I agree with Wiggins and McTighe "teaching is a means to an end" (p. 19). What media techniques, artist and concepts will I teach to bring students to the

point of being able to "do" and "understand"? This is the point where many teachers, and myself, historically have started. It is the fun stuff that will occur in the art classroom. Yet, the *fun stuff* with no greater purpose does not constitute a holistic education. That is why I incorporated a "*what*", "*why*", and "*how*" approach to designing the learning activities. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? How are we doing it? If these three questions cannot be answered then they need to be left out of the schedule of learning activities. This reinforces the idea that I can't teach everything (Wiggins, 1989). Teachers have to consider the time allowed, available supplies and student interests.

Student interests are an important part of planning an effective art curriculum and I must consider those if there is going to be true engaged learning. Over the last 14 years my students have provided me a window into their world that helped me plan the curriculum I used this year. However, because student interests, and those of society as a whole, are in a constant state of change, so must be the curriculum. It is a living document in a constant state of change, just like our students.

Big Ideas and Essential Concepts

As part of the backwards design model is the establishment of big ideas. What's the big idea? Why is it important? In the words of Olivia Gude (2007), "students whose work investigates issues of real concern to them are more engaged in the learning process" (p. 8). Engaging students is vital in motivating them to invest time and energy into learning. Big ideas must be relevant to the life of the student. I have found that when I present lessons based on questions about what students see as important in their life they are more willing to put thought and effort into their work. "Sydney Walker and Michael Parson argue that focusing art curriculum around human issues does not relinquish what is valuable about the arts, but presents

more of an opportunity to capitalize on exactly what makes art powerful and significant, their ability to convey the complexity and ambiguity of human values, beliefs, interpretations about life" (Stewart & Walker, 2005. p.30) Art doesn't happen in a vacuum and neither does art education. As teachers we must help our students gain the skills they need to express their ideas about the world they live in and encourage them to recognize the value of their own perspective, as well as those of their peers. Art documents and comments on the society in which it was created. Skill and technique without meaningful application does not reflect the aims of an art education in the 21st century.

Big ideas are often referred to as themes or *enduring ideas* (Stewart & Walker, 2005). This is because in order for a big idea to be meaningful it must emerge from concepts "that have drawn the attention of humans throughout the ages" (Stewart & Walker, 2005. p.17). They have endured history. From the enduring idea come specific key concepts and questions that build the scaffolding for instruction and student learning. Again I return to the process of questioning. This questioning process enables students to internalize concepts in order to construct their own knowledge. It is the establishment of the overreaching *Big Idea* that guides all instruction, learning activates and assessments. This is why the use of big ideas in building curriculum fits directly into the Backwards Design model for curriculum design.

Utilizing the central theme of Identity as the guiding light for curriculum design allowed me to bring art instruction beyond just art making and into the creating of opportunities for students to learn "how artistic expression of humans throughout the world and over time has served a range of purposes within society" (Stewart & Walker, 2005. p. 8). Sydney Walker sets forth in *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* (2001) that "Big ideas – broad, important human issues – are characterized by complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity. Big ideas do not

completely explicate an idea, but represent a host of concepts that form the idea" (Walker, 2001, p. 1).

Thematic instruction involves utilizing a single key concept to guide the units of instruction, but not necessarily an entire year of instruction. Part of my research was to inquire into the practicality and functionality of using a single large concept to unify an entire school year of art instruction. The *Big Idea* that unified my curriculum, and therefore my research, was *Identity*. This is a rather broad concept that allows room for exploration of the diverse aspects of identity and its construct. As Daniel and Stuhr state in *Suggestion for Integrating the Arts into Curriculum* (2006), "big ideas represent significant aspects of life, such as identity or social codes of conduct, and they reflect the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions of our culture. Big ideas also combine elements of both the concrete and abstract in a provocative way" (p. 7). What would be more ambiguous than the concept of identity? Identity, its development and expression, is full of ambiguity and multiplicity. Because identity is multilayered it presents itself as a large enough concept to govern a school year's worth of exploration through art.

Action Research

Action Research is a form of empirical qualitative research conducted across disciplines, is rooted in the social sciences and is based in practitioner inquiry and reflection within their professional setting. Contemporary scholars in art education have defined Action Research and what it looks like in a variety of ways (Delacruz, 2011; Ferrance, 2000; May, 1993; Sigler, 2009). However, Nel Noddings best articulates what a teacher engaged in an action research inquiry should specifically do in her Summer 2004 article in *Kappa Delta Pi Record*,

To get ideas, to move ahead, we - as educators – should listen to our children and students. When we listen to them, we learn what they are going through and this

knowledge can be used to shape what we do in teaching. It can help us to select and arrange curriculum, plan lessons, choose instructional methods, and seek better modes of evaluation. What we learn from our students should induce us to reflect on all we do and all we are asked to do. (p. 154)

To deliberately pay attention by observing what we do and say, what our students do and say, and then take those observations and put them to good use in construction learning opportunities is the point of action research. We must listen, look, reflect, philosophize, internalize and formulate questions from the living environment our classroom if we are to continue keeping up with the needs of our students.

I find Wanda May's definition to be most direct and relevant to my inquiry. May presents that action research is "the study of one's own practice" (May, 1993, p. 1). A more specific definition for action research as it applies to teachers was given by Ferrance (2000) as cited by Sigler (2009) provides a descriptive definition of action research within a k-12 classroom setting: "[A]ction research specifically refers to a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future. This research is carried out within the context of the teacher's environment – that is, with the students and at the school in which the teacher works – on questions that deal with educational matters at hand" (p. 1). Implicit in the term action research is the idea that teachers will begin a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, reflection and deciding on a course of action. When these decisions begin to change the school environment, a different set of circumstances appears with different problems posed, which require a new look. Indeed, many action research projects are started with a particular problem to solve, whose solution leads to other areas of study (p. 2).

Action research is framed by the interests and questions of the teacher and has a strong reflective component in analyzing the data collected (May, 2006). In the realm of education the teacher fills the roles of both researcher and research subject. While much of action research involves a collaborative element between researchers with a shared topic of inquiry, or a teacher/researcher with participating students, there are valid instances where the “teacher works alone gathering data within the role of teacher” (Sigler, 2009, p. 18). Data collection methods can vary but often include observation, interviews, field notes, student and teacher journals, case studies, surveys, student written work samples, checklists, audio and video tapes, and photographic documentation of work created by students and teachers (Degge, 1982; Delacruz, 2011; Ferrance, 2000; May, 1993; Sigler, 2009). This data is then analyzed to discover reoccurring themes, similarities, differences and inconsistencies. What often happens in this type of research is that new questions will arise as the data is interpreted by the teacher/researcher. The beauty of action research is that its methodology allows for alterations in the research direction as new questions arise, as they lead to new discoveries that can ultimately enhance the learning environment beyond the original research concept.

In my research I sought to find out how to create and implement an engaging high school thematic art curriculum that is designed around the central theme of identity. Due to the qualitative nature of my research, I used a range of action research methodologies for data collection and analysis. I inquired into my natural classroom environment as I interacted with my students and curriculum I had designed in order to make sense of that living learning environment. My action research is a reflective self-study of how I engaged contemporary themes in curriculum design for the specific environment of my professional daily life. I

constantly looked both inward and outward as I found myself immersed in the context of my high school art classroom.

I used a wide range of data collection methods so that I could triangulate my findings as they informed my question of how to create an engaging thematic curriculum for a high school art class. I documented the process of developing my thematic curriculum as it unfolded within the real world setting of my classroom. The data I collected from my inquiry was generated by student written reflections and end of unit assessments, audio recordings of student/teacher discussions, photographs of student in-progress and final artworks, student surveys and my research journal of notations, questions, observations, discoveries and reflections. Using an inductive process I looked for emerging patterns and inconsistencies in classroom discussions, student reflections, my own questions, successes and pitfalls. Recording my observations in a field journal allowed me to look back on previous class sessions to reflect on how I could improve the instructional strategies used or how I may be able to reframe content to better meet the learning needs of my students. My research required that I reflected on, and triangulated, my data collections in order to develop a deeper understanding of my specific learning community. Both the consistencies and the inconsistencies created new questions as to the what, why, and how my curriculum instruction engaged students in learning. The cycle of questions, answers and reflections lead the development of new questions and then the cycle often started all over again.

I believe that teachers on a regular basis often do this kind of continuum of inquiry subconsciously. The questions that emerged from my process of inquiry and reflection will be articulated and elaborated on in the next chapters. It is the documentation and sharing of how I

navigated the inquiry cycle that is suggestive of the Narrative Research methodologies I also used.

Narrative Research

“Art teachers’ thinking, planning, decision making, and response to the conditions of teaching are important but undervalued aspects of their work” (Delacruz, 1997, p. 21). Using narrative research in education recognizes the living and working conditions of the teacher in the trenches as essential data for the realistic world of education. For the purposes of my research I will stipulate both that narrative research can fit within an action research model and that it is a valid and valuable research methodology in that it allows my voice as the teacher/research to qualify my research findings.

To narrate means to tell. To tell a story is to share an idea, a discovery, an event or an experience. “[S]torytelling, or narration, as symbolic action, words, or deeds, that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (Delacruz, 2011, p. 3). Teaching and learning, or the making of meaning, does not happen in isolation, but is solidified through shared experiences. Learning takes place through the sharing of such stories. This is a human social occurrence. The practice of giving the title of “narrator” to the person talking is a social construct that has reemerged in the field of educational research and into the practice and experiences of teachers (Moen, 2006). Therefore, narrative research is a methodology that sits within the framework of the established sociocultural theory (Moen, 2006).

The belief that individuals learn and develop through participation in social activities in the world (within society) is one held in common amongst the different versions of social constructivism (Moen, 2006). Dialogue is one of the most fundamental aspects of what it means

to be human and share experiences (Moen, 2006). Because all human action and interaction is in some way dialogic in nature, the study of that dialogue, whether it be the between subjects, researcher and subject, or the internal dialogue of the researcher, it is necessary to understand the living conditions of any social or professional group. The internal dialogue occurring within the brain of a teacher is one that, if brought into the realm of the real through the written narrative, can serve as valid research findings of what it is that teachers do and illuminate the importance of those actions. The internal dialogue is the “talking through” of an idea with oneself in the process of coming to a meaningful conclusion or solidify ones own knowledge (Meon,2006).

Narrative research is an emerging methodology used in studies relating to educational practice and experiences, and is situated within the qualitative, or interpretive, research family. (Moen, 2006). It is placed "within the framework of sociocultural theory, where the challenge for the researcher is to examine and understand how human actions are related to the social context in which they occur and how and where they occur through growth" (Moen, 2006. p. 56). Moen (2006) articulates that narratives "enable us to study teachers and the teaching in movement, in a process of development, and within the teacher's social, cultural, and institutional settings" (p. 59). "Narratives from classrooms and teaching incorporate both empirical data and relevant theory" (Moen, 2006, p. 66). Delacruz (2011) sees narrative research as an inquiry method that dates back beyond the last century to the ancient tradition of oral histories and cultural writing and that blends with contemporary post-Marxist qualitative methods of inquiry to create a new form of inquiry. On the shoulders of the ancient tradition of oral histories, narrative research emerged as a valid form of empirical research. What happens when a story is told through the written narrative is that it becomes more than just a theory. It becomes a living experience validated by the act of sharing it. That story represents the dialogue between the researcher, the

subjects of research and the community of practice. It is “a form of engaged scholarship with a community practice” (p. 2). Narrative research has become utilized within a wide variety of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences as a valued form of inquiry. (Delacruz, 2011) This type of research (sometimes called *narratology*) is much like most qualitative research but has its own unique inquiry strategies and reporting protocols (Delacruz, 2011). According to Delacruz, narrative research has the following characteristics:

- Abandonment of the search for a grand totalizing answer
- Reliance on a variety of naturalistic documentary, data collection and inquiry strategies
- Desire to excavate and illuminate hidden or marginalized aspects of human experience.
- Interest in social interactions; concern for unequal power relationships
- Acknowledgement of the importance of the conscious subjectivity of the researcher
- Use of evocative language, poetic devices, and metamorphic thinking

Delacruz (2011) further describes narrative research “as a form of engaged scholarship with a community practice” (p. 2).

My community of practice is *art education*, more specifically; it is high school art education. Through conversation with other high school educators across disciplines I have found that we all share many of the same questions, concerns, frustrations, apprehensions, celebrations, and the successes and pitfalls of teaching and living in the realm of secondary education. We all have stories. It is these stories that bind us together as a community, and the

sharing of those stories that give us all the strength and support needed to continue to make a positive difference in the lives of each other and our students.

The lives of students are impacted by the lives of their teachers. In the realm of education narrative research includes the study of teacher's lives and interactions with their students, school administration, curriculum and its design and implementation process, student and teacher collaboration practices and ultimately the "teachers' phenomenological investigations into the nature and meaning of their work" (Delacruz, 2011. p. 6). It is the first hand accounts of teachers' lived experiences, excerpts from personal diaries and research journals, observation field notes, photographs and recordings, multitudes of curriculum and school documents, memories, hopes, fears, apprehensions, instructional handouts, lessons and unit plans, web discoveries, media experimentations, assessment strategies, parent and community interactions, rituals, transitions between school time and home time thinking and acting, and conversations with parents and community members that become the "data" of narrative research. Ultimately, it is the real world experiences of the teacher that is communicated, thereby becoming validated as meaningful and relevant to the understanding and advancement of teaching and learning in the 21st century (Delacruz, 2011).

Narrative research also privileges my voice as the researcher (Delacruz, 2011; May, 2006). By writing it down and sharing it with others my own subjective experience becomes visible. Everyone has a story. Creating that story is what we do to define our existence as humans. Part of the narrative tradition is the allowance for questions of power, authority, social relations and interactions of and between teachers and students. I ask questions about the social, cultural, political and power relationships within my art classes. Narrative research in education is ultimately about the subjective view of the life of a teacher. Narrative research is the story of

the teacher/researcher, and one that is often left out of theoretical and practical research. (Delacruz, 2011; May, 2006).

I utilized a narrative approach to interpreting the data collected through the methods stipulated in the sections above to further analyze how my instruction was presenting students with the opportunities to construct their own knowledge of art, themselves, and the world around them. I sought to know more about the nature of my curriculum, my instructional practices, and my students' levels of engagement and success within my classroom in order to be able to change, improve and adapt my instructional methods to guide my students to learning in and through art. I wanted to understand how I could engage my students in learning and improve my practice as their teacher. I want to give a voice to what contemporary teens are saying is relevant and important in their world. I want other teachers to know they are not alone in their struggle to connect with students and help them learn or how to navigating the minefields of administration, parents and community involvement. I recognize that I cannot possibly answer all the questions I have within this one study, because the answers that are found always lead to more questions. However, it is in the quest for personal and professional knowledge itself that will bring about a better understanding of the unknown.

I suggest here that *my story*, as the teacher struggling to create something that is meaningful for my students, and learning from them at the same time, lets other educators know they are not alone in their own professional development cycle and serves to qualify my final conclusions and the basis for construction of my art educational website developed around the central theme of *Identity* in High School Art Education. As a teacher with little time for high academic jargon relating to the theoretical or philosophical explorations of how to incorporate content or manage an ever-changing classroom community, I recognize that my peers in high

school art education do not either. I am inspired more by what I read by in-service teachers about how they deal with real life educational issues because their writing is grounded in reality and not theory. In sharing the reality of what it is like to navigate through designing curriculum and providing instruction as I see it will validate the fact that teaching is often more of a mission than it is a job.

Research Design

The subjects of my research were my curriculum, my students, and myself as their teacher. As a form of qualitative research, my study involved prolonged observations and engagement with the subjects of inquiry. With prolonged study as a necessity for this type of empirical research I began this school year by acquiring written informed consent from my students and their parents to be participants in my study. I further obtained approval from the University of Florida International Review Board (UFIRB #2012-U-364) to conduct this research into my practice. My position in this research is that of teacher, researcher and participant all wrapped up into one. While I was teaching, I studied the reactions, understandings, questions, artworks and writing samples of my students. As identified by Eisner, and elaborated on by Stokrocki in *Qualitative forms of research methods*, the six key features of qualitative inquiry identified are "1) field-focused, 2) constructed so that the researcher is the instrument, 3) interpretive in nature, 4) expressive in language, 5) highly detailed, and 6) persuasive" (as cited in Eisner, 1991, pp. 32-40). Some scholars also argue that the personal narrative is also an important aspect of qualitative inquiry. (Engin, 2011; Delacruz, 2011; Moen, 2006).

My qualitative research was guided by questions that have personal significance to me as an art educator. For this research I focused on seeking an answer to the question of how I could

create and implement a thematic curriculum that utilizes the backwards design model as developed by Wiggins and McTighe for the development of a curriculum based on the big idea (Stewart & Walker, 2005) of *Identity* that is engaging to the 21st century high school learner. As the researcher I was the leading instrument of investigation and I used a systematic process of describing, analyzing and interpreting to characterize and classify information observed in the everyday life of my high school art classroom (Stokrocki, 1997). Operating within a post-positivist construct, I used self-corrective techniques to minimize any distorting effect of my own bias. I did this by triangulating my data collection methods by using a variety of techniques like field notes, taped interviews, personal reflections, surveys, and art or writing samples (Lather, 1986). This data collection also included documenting through a researcher journal the teacher and student engagement. I participated in and observed the living environment of my classroom. This included the questions and discoveries that emerged during the curriculum design process, actual instruction, my unit reflections, and the successes and pitfalls of instruction. I photographed student artworks as examples of their interaction with my instruction and the thematic curriculum. To bring further validity to my findings I utilized the students written reflections during the art creating process and at the conclusion of instructional units. I utilized aspects of both Action and Narrative Research methodologies to conduct, document and validate my research in thematic curriculum design and instruction.

Chapter 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this qualitative research study in teacher thinking and praxis was to examine how I discovered what I really needed to effectively design and implement a thematic art curriculum relevant to the 21st century high school learner. In my study I used action and narrative research methodologies to investigate my own teaching praxis and student engagement as I implemented and adapted a previously designed curriculum with my combined Advanced Art and Honors (AA&H) class, and as I explored curricular possibilities during the first year of my new 3D Design class. This was an investigation into curriculum design as it unfolded in my classroom with two of the five class periods I teach. I chose to investigate the viability of using the single theme of *Identity* to unify all instruction and student learning activities for an entire school year. At the same time I utilized a backwards design approach to constructing the individual units of instruction for each of my classes. In this chapter I will discuss the research environment and the findings of the study into my teaching practice. This research includes the documentation of student engagement in learning through in-progress and final artwork imagery, student project reflections and final course evaluations, excerpts from my reflective journal and blog entries which document teacher thinking and planning and questions that rise through the reflective process. This chapter is the documentation of my journey to understanding and what I learned along the path of curriculum design and effective instruction.

Within a nine-month school year, 10 months if you want to count the required extra teacher workdays, I collected a mass of relevant data. I will not address all of my findings here. I will further narrow the focus of findings to the three largest themes that emerged throughout my

study. The greatest amount of knowledge I gained through this study can be assimilated into the overreaching themes of *dimensions of reflectivity, change, and the difference between theory and practice when it comes to the realities of teaching high school art in the 21st century*. I will present my findings as vignettes of experiences that unfolded during my research. Before I share these stories I will introduce you to my teaching and learning environment as I experienced it this school year.

Setting The Stage

The 2011-12 school year was full of changes and new beginnings. This year I started with a new principal, two new assistant principals, a new art teacher and it was my first year as the Fine Arts Department Chairman. Having the demand for art classes that necessitated the addition of a third art teacher is a tribute to how many students want to take art and my administration's support of the arts as an important discipline within the entire school structure. While my administration is supportive of the arts that does not mean that they fund the arts at the level it needs to service as many students as are in our classrooms. Like many other art teachers who have watched their instructional budgets slowly deteriorate, I have seen my budget decrease by 35% over the last four years. What this means to instruction is that I utilize the materials I can find more than the materials I can buy. While this is frustrating, it also helps put a new focus on conservation, recycling, and making materials go further than you ever expected. The lacking of supply budget is just another creative problem to solve. It's the kind of problem solving teachers do every day.



Figure 1. Powhatan High School Art Department. Photograph By Stephanie Wirt, 2011

Teaching on an even / odd day rotation, I saw my classes for 90 minutes every other day.

On “Day 2” I began the day with a 50 minute planning period, then I taught a 3D Design (3D) class of 25 students ranging in age from 14-19 and one Portfolio Development (PD) student. In this class I had some students who have had one year of high school art and some had three. Four students I had taught in a previous art or photography class. Five students I was also teaching in more than one art class. That left 75% of my students that I had no idea what their abilities,

experience or interests may be. All I did know is that they had to have passed Art I, with a ‘C’ or better to be in the class. Whether they remember anything from that class is unknown.

The Advanced Art, Honors, and Portfolio Developments students I taught in the same classroom after 3D Design. Three of these students were also in the 3D class. This had its advantages and disadvantages. While I got to know those students quite well in back to back classes, they also had a tendency to get what I like to call “Art Overload.” Both classes were learning under the same unifying theme of *Identity* so there was topical overlap. I did not plan on doing the same art projects with both classes, but I had intended on having some of the same discussions, but with a different focus (more in-depth for the Advanced Art) for the two classes. I had planned on using some of the same class opening creativity prompts with both classes, but with this overlap I had to change that plan. Within this class there were two honors students, twelve advanced students, and six PD students. This is where things got really interesting. Advanced Art was designed for the “Advanced” art student. However, the definition of advanced is variable depending on whom you ask. If you ask the Guidance department, advanced is defined as the student who has had at least two years of art and is a junior or senior. If you ask the art teachers it is the student who has had three years of art, made at least a ‘B’ in their last art class, and shows a high aptitude for art. Because this was the first year any of these classes had been offered the gap between expectation and reality was rather large. I will address that gap later in this chapter.

Portfolio Development students consisted of seniors who had already taken the highest level of art or photography that we had offered to this point. This class was designed for the self-motivated independent study student to allow them freedom to pursue their individual art interests and prepare a portfolio for college entrance. My past experience has been that there are

not many who are disciplined enough to work at a high level of independence and actually get much accomplished; especially if they are in a classroom of many other students receiving different instruction. These students were no exception. Of the six students, four of them were to be working in photography and two in studio arts. Most all ended up wanting to work in studio arts at some point in the year. This meant that I found myself teaching new skills to students with little experience while also teaching more advanced skills with the Advanced Art students. I had to readjust my expectations of student artwork often. I had students going from the main classroom to the photography studio to work in the darkroom or on the computers at the same time as I was instructing the AA&H curriculum. To say that I was always on the run checking on or instructing students is an understatement. However, due to the numbers of these three classes combined only adding up to twenty, in order for these students to have the art experience they wanted and deserved, they all had to be grouped together into one classroom. In a world ruled by the concept of putting as many "butts in seats" (a term although not directly used by my administration, seems a common goal in schools these days) with the least amount of teachers needed possible, grouping multiple levels of students into one class has become an all too common practice. While it's not the best situation for students or teachers, it is the reality of public education and we, as teachers, have to be more than just experts in our content area but also experts at differentiation and classroom management.

School Year Beginnings

The beginning of the school year is an exciting time and the time to really "hook" the students. It is also the time to figure out just what academic, artistic and self-motivation level of student I was to teach. There are a few techniques I used to get students engaged from the get go and evaluate them at the same time. A few years ago I designed a student self-introduction

form (Figures 2 and 3) that required student to give more than just their contact and schedule information. After all, the contact information and student schedules are all now readily available

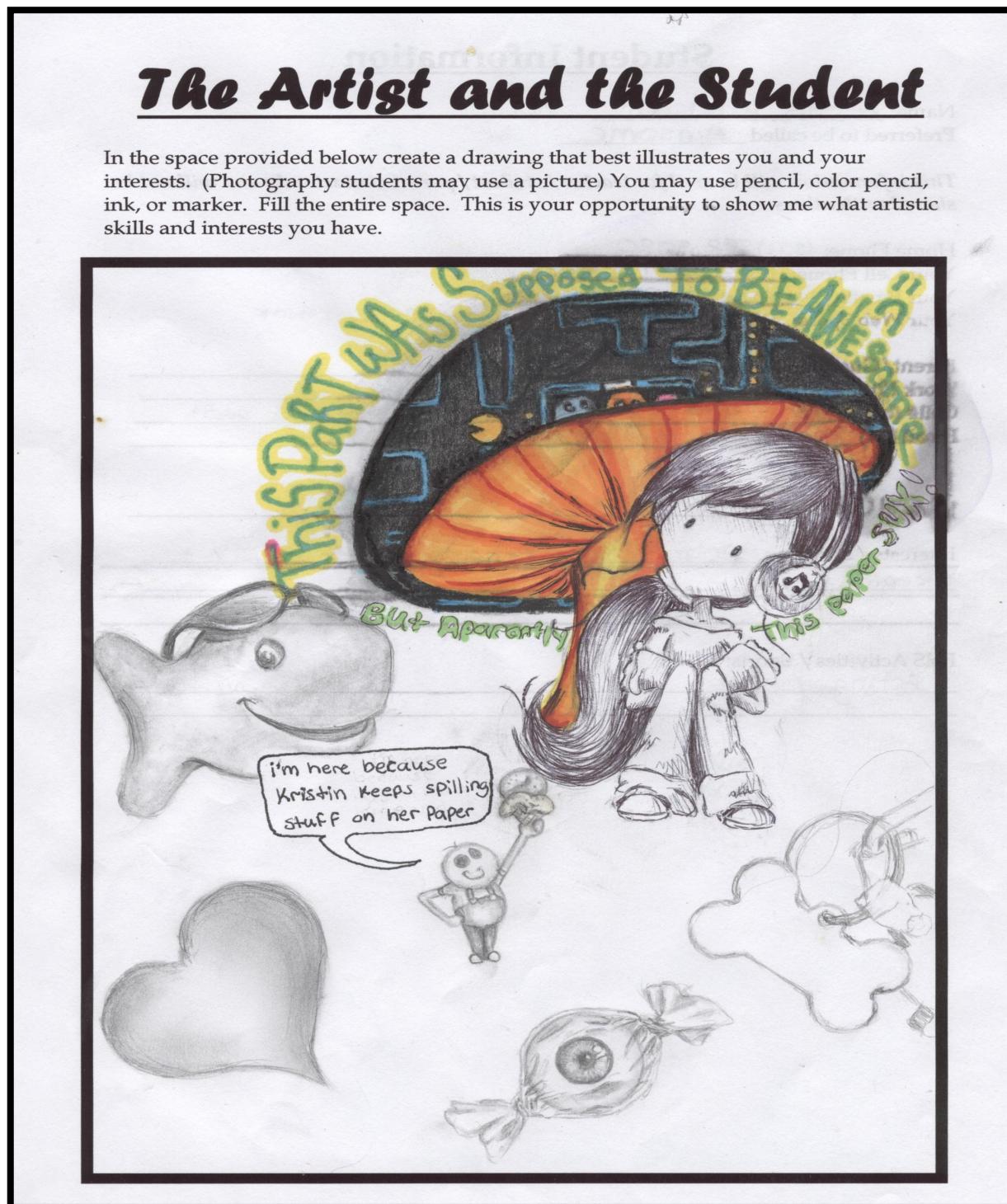


Figure 2. The Artist And The Student Information Page. September 2011.

on the school network. I am interested in knowing what the students' interests are and their creative and drawing abilities. Every year I am reminded of Victor Lowenfeld's stages of development when I review these assignments. (See my website for stages of art development.

<http://www.wirtartalk.org/studentteacher-lesson-resources.html>) An awareness of a student's

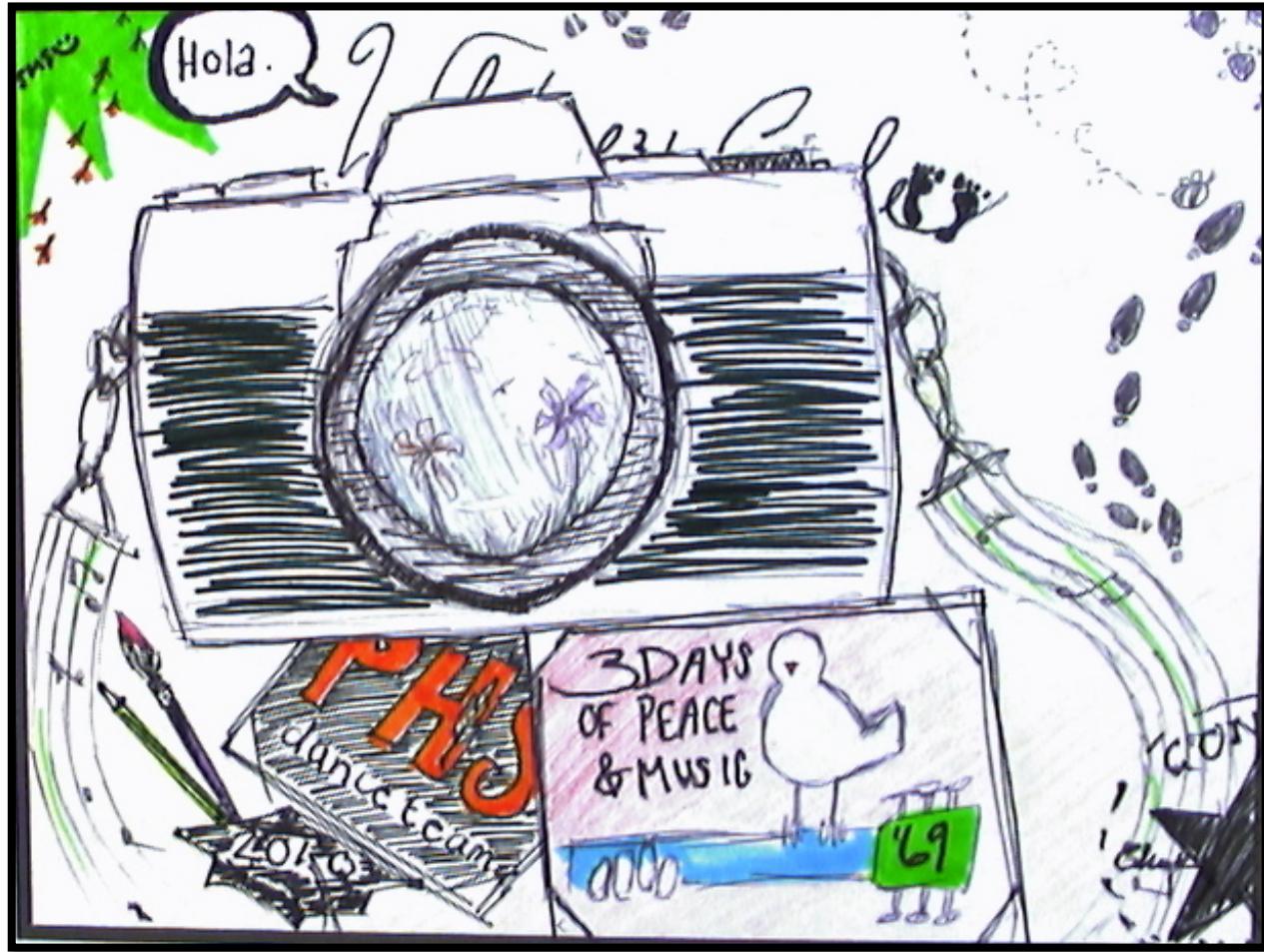


Figure 3. Detail From The Artist And The Student Information Page

current level of visual development helps me know where I need to start visual perception instruction with individual students (Eisner, 1984). It seems that every year for the last four years the drawings have gotten less and less detailed and look like there was much less time spent on them as I would expect for a first assignment where the students had free reign on what they wanted to draw that would give me a clue as to their interests and drawing abilities. I've often wondered why that is. Is it that the artistic ability of the students I have now is weaker than in

years past? Is it because students don't know how to handle an open-ended assignment? Has the focus of high stakes standardized testing damaged their creative ability? Is it because my students are increasingly spending less time on their work and doing just enough to get by? Is it that my students don't take the assignment seriously or recognize that this is their opportunity to show me what they like and what they can do? I don't know the answer to all these questions, but I do have some theories about that. I will address those theories in Chapter 5.

I have experienced that the complexity of real world public education creates a gap between educational theory and the actual praxis of teaching and learning. It seems obvious to say that teachers such as myself find a disjuncture between theory (as espoused in the academic journals serving our professions) and the realities of classroom practice. What is important to say here is the powerful manner in which reflection on experiences cast light on the essential differences between educational theory and what really happens in the classroom. I will come back to the discussion of the difference between theory and praxis in art education later, but for now I'd like to venture into the realm of reflectivity.

Dimensions of Reflectivity

Teachers are in a constant state of reflection everyday when planning lessons and while teaching. It is something we do almost unconsciously, but it is something that when brought to the forefront of our minds becomes an extremely beneficial tool to not only improving our instruction, but in understanding our students (Delacruz, 1997). This year I have identified three different dimensions of reflectivity that occur throughout the teaching and the learning experiences. In my research these three areas of reflectivity emerged as recurring actions. These three areas are the same for both student and teacher, but with slight variations. The first realm of reflectivity emerges as an artwork for the student or a lesson for the teacher is in progress. The

second realm of reflectivity comes at the end of an artwork, or a unit of instruction for the teacher. The final reflective realm comes at the end of the year and includes looking back on all that has happened, been created, and learned over an extended period of time.



Figure 4. 3D Design Student *Layers of Me* Artwork. Cardboard, Tissue Paper And Collages Images

The first, and most repeated dimension for the student occurs while their artwork is developing. This often happens as an ongoing conversation between student and teacher but at times this is a written assignment for students.

To assist students in this process I utilized what I like to call the “WWH” process. With that process students answered three questions about their work. Those three questions were: What are you doing? Why are you doing it? and how are you doing it? These three questions were often answered simply at first but by the end of the year, having repeated practice, students were elaborating on their answers. The majority of my students, with the exception of my AA&H and PD classes, tried to get by with using one-word answers. I heard responses like “a sculpture”, “because you said I had to make something” and “stacking cardboard and paper.” With the first project in 3D (see Figure 4 and website <http://www.wirtartalk.org/unit-1-layers-of-me.html>) students were making a relief sculpture using their initials and image of themselves, family, friends and interests to illustrate the things and people that contribute to the construction of their identity. Colors where chosen according to their symbolic meaning, as researched by the student. Size and placement of images were determined according to either their level of importance to the student or as three areas of their identity construction (top layer = view of self, middle layer = interests and back layer = supportive elements).

In-progress student reflections proved to be even more useful with my AA&H and PD



Figure 5. (AA) Student In-Progress Work

students than with my 3D students. I attribute this to the fact that the more advanced students have had more experience discussing their work and talking through their ideas with their peers and their teacher. The artwork these advanced students created also developed over longer periods of time, were more in depth and often involved more than one media. However, just as the 3D students, the advanced students also needed specific instruction on how to write a summative reflection. Students could talk about the choices they made in creating and what their artwork visually communicates, but when it came to writing it down in an essay format they had to be guided through it the first two times they wrote. (See Appendix C for *Window Into My World* student reflection.) From conversations with other art teachers, and from my own experience, I have found that instruction in the arts also means instruction in critically looking at and questioning art and the world around them, researching and writing.



Figure 6. (AA) Student *Window Into My World* Project

While I helped students develop their personal reflective skills I also asked myself the same three questions throughout planning and teaching. After 14 years of teaching, my in-progress reflections often consist of single phrase “reminders” or sketches of what I’m doing as well as why and how. (See Figures 7 & 8) Other times my in-progress reflections come as end of

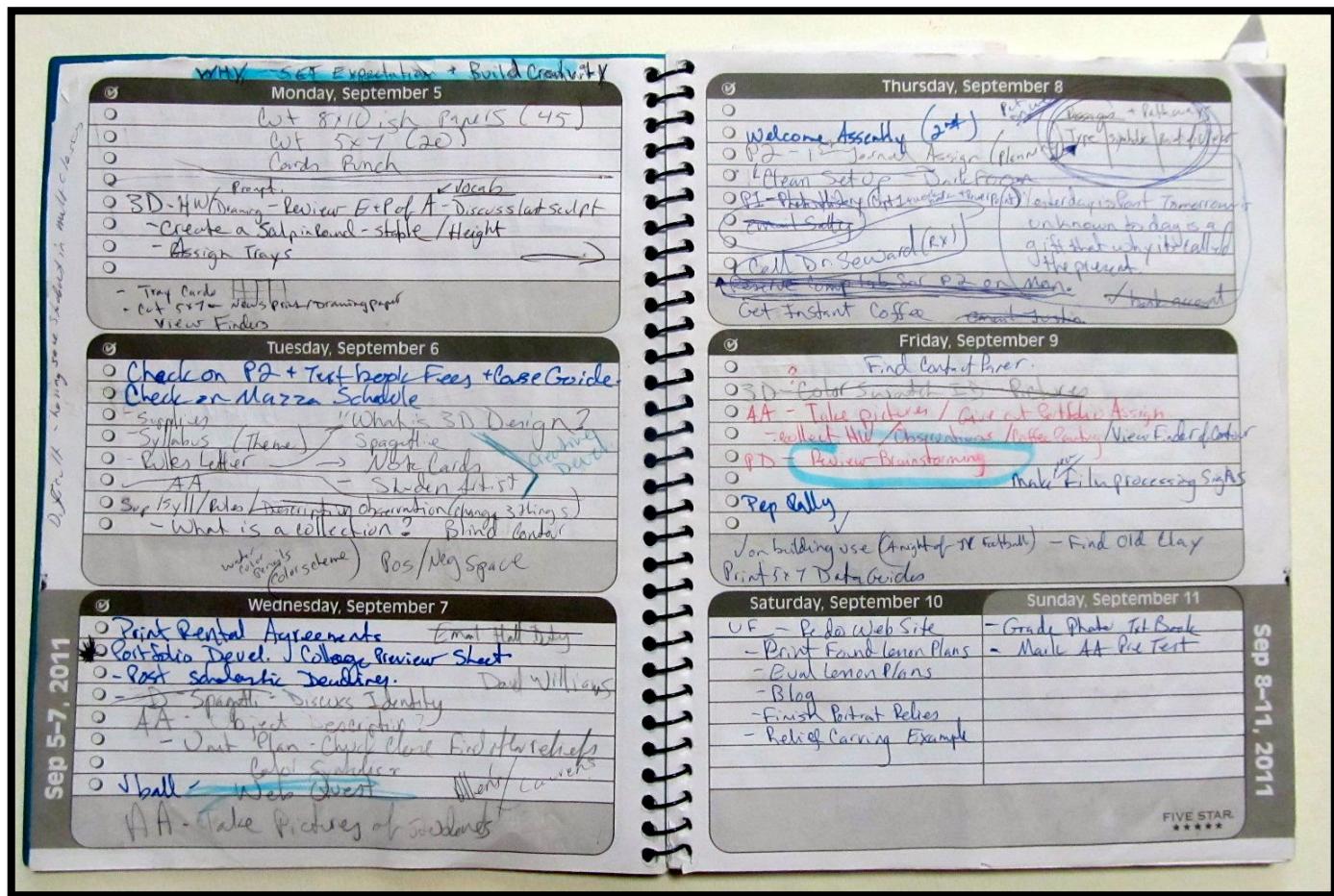


Figure 7. Teacher Planner Detail

the day blogging. (See my Reflections of Art and Education blog at

<http://artedreflections.blogspot.com/2012/03/giving-up-too-easily.html>)

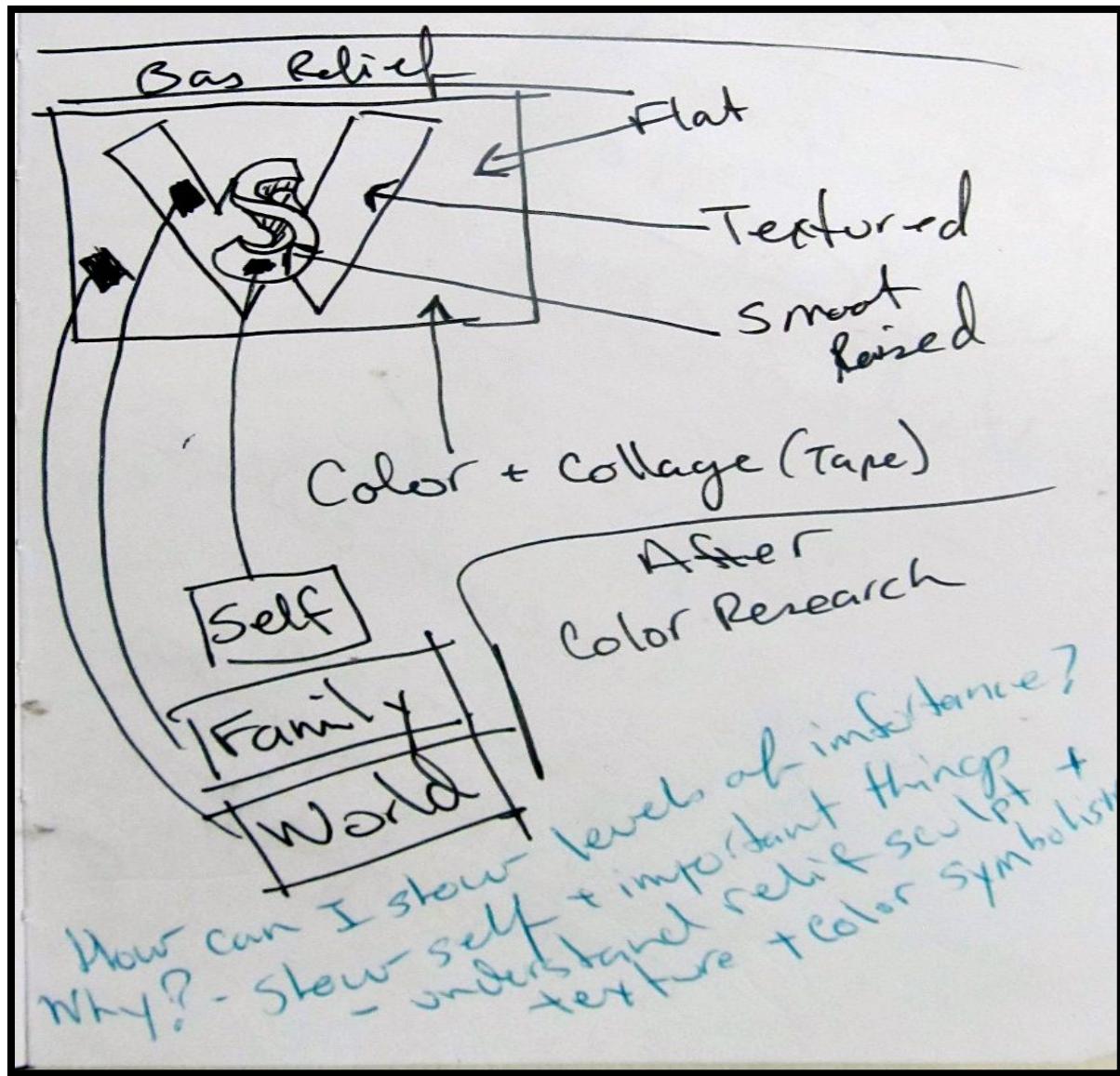


Figure 8. Teacher Planning Details From Journal

Even though teachers are constantly reflecting and re-thinking lessons sometimes it takes actually writing our thoughts down to get a grip on what we are thinking and to make sense of all the day's events (C. Roland, Personal communications, 2012). My in-progress reflections often consisted of articulating what happened, what worked, what didn't and what I learned from the experience. One example of this may be found in my September 15th, 2011 blog entry. After taking students to the computer lab to do an investigation on the symbolic meaning of color I

realized the loopholes in my instruction. (<http://artedreflections.blogspot.com/2011/09/reflection-on-3d-design-color.html>)

The second area of reflectivity for students is the immediate reflection done at the completion of an artwork where students look back on how and why they created an artwork and what they learned along the way. I realized when the students completed the first project's written reflection that they were going to need more guidance in how to mine their artwork and processes for meaning in order for their writing to be truly reflective. When I read them I found them to be significantly lacking in any depth. The next class day I took all 25 of the students to the commons and spread them out so that no one was sitting by their buddies and I gave them back their projects, original grading rubric, and self-assessment/reflection papers. (See my website for grading rubric at <http://www.wirtartalk.org/unit-1-layers-of-me.html>) I told them that they had as much time as they needed to assess their work, think about why they chose the colors and images they included, how it was all put together and what the artwork communicated about them and their life. I also told them that after their writing we would discuss all the artworks and each person would have to explain why they included or excluded things in their artwork. When they were done with their writing they were to line up their artwork against the wall and once they were all there we would talk about them. What followed was what I hoped would happen naturally, but now realize that high school students need more prompting and encouragement to actually think beyond the surface and to be able to articulate their ideas. The discussions about the artworks; what makes one more or less successful, visually appealing or informative and what the students learned from the process of creating, was productive and showed that the students did understand the concepts underlying the unit. Even though I had not originally intended on spending an entire class period on self assessments, art work reflections and

critiques of student work, it was a valuable experience that not only helped students, but helped me to realize that I needed to slow down and allow more time for actually teaching students how to look at their work and evaluate it for content, craftsmanship, message and aesthetic appeal. I realized that I often forget that most of my students have not had previous instruction in interpretive or reflective writing about art or how to justify why something is successful beyond the statement of “because I like it.”

The amount of time we spent on writing the first project reflection paid off with the reflection students wrote on later projects. Until I read the student reflections from the *Stories of Me* project on the second quarter assessment I thought the entire unit was, in the words of one of my former students, ”Epoch Fail.” I will elaborate on this project further in the section on change, but I stipulate here that after the introduction to the project everything else related to the students making art went horribly wrong. I made miscalculations, the students didn’t follow directions, and artworks were started, destroyed, restarted and abandoned. It was a mess and we all were happy to see it end. However, it was their writing about what they actually learned that made me realize that learning in art is not always about learning to make something. Often it is about learning how to deal with the unknown, adapt to uncontrollable situations, overcome obstacles, solve technical and creative problems and keep a positive attitude in the face of adversity.

After all the trials and tribulations of the second project in 3D Design the student reflections showed that they learned more about life than they did about any art process. 3D students on their end of unit assessment made the following statements when they were asked to elaborate on what they learned through the process of creating their *Stories of Me* artwork.

“I learned that patience is the key to success. That our project might not turn out how we intended from the beginning, but eventually you’ll end up with something. It broadened our perspective and touched on our creativity.”

“Mistakes aren’t always bad, they help us learn.”

“If things don’t go the way you want them to change it. If something is bothering you that much, step away then come back when you have a different idea.”

“We learned more about problem solving than anything. How if something went wrong in the project, it was the student’s job to find his way around it, to complete his/her image.”

Finally there is the end of year reflection, which brings together all the activities and things learned, assesses the quality of their work and evaluates the course as a whole. My own areas of reflections as the teacher are a bit more in-depth than my students, but then again I have the benefits of experience and the goal of self-improvement, which drives my reflective process. For me, I was constantly questioning what I was doing, how my students were engaging in the learning processes, and whether or not I was helping students grow or holding them back. At the end of every project I’d write in my journal or blog about how I thought it all went and what I should do differently if I did it again. ([See my blog post at](#)

<http://artedreflections.blogspot.com/2012/03/to-some-i-teach-to-those-that-allow-me.html>)

It wasn’t until I re-read the project reflections and the final course evaluations at the end of the year that I was truly able to appreciate the growth in my students and that what they actually learned was not always what I had intended, but often even more valuable a lesson than I could have planned. One such example of this occurred with the *Story of Me* project.

What was supposed to be an exploration of how we all have stories to tell about things that have happened or are important to us and how that can inform an artwork, turned out to be about dealing with changes and overcoming obstacles. I was so excited to introduce my students to carving and casting and giving them an opportunity to tell their own story through their artwork that I missed some very important steps in the planning and preparation process. One of the biggest *missed* steps was not presenting students with more relevant contemporary relief or narrative artworks. My students did not relate to the artworks I presented. Through conversations with individual students during their design processes and with the year end evaluations I



Figure 9. Detail Of Ghiberti's Gates Of Paradise, Baptistry Doors In Florence, Italy. Photograph taken by Stephanie Wirt, 2012

realized the artworks I chose as examples of narrative art did not relate to the current lives of my students. The introduction to the unit went smoothly. We used Robert Hastings's poem *The Station* (<http://www.wirtartalk.org/window-lesson-2.html>) as a point of departure for discussion of important events in our lives and really living in those moments. (I also used this poem for a lesson in AA&H but with different objectives and media options.) I showed them images of Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise (see Figure 9) and we discussed levels of relief and visual story

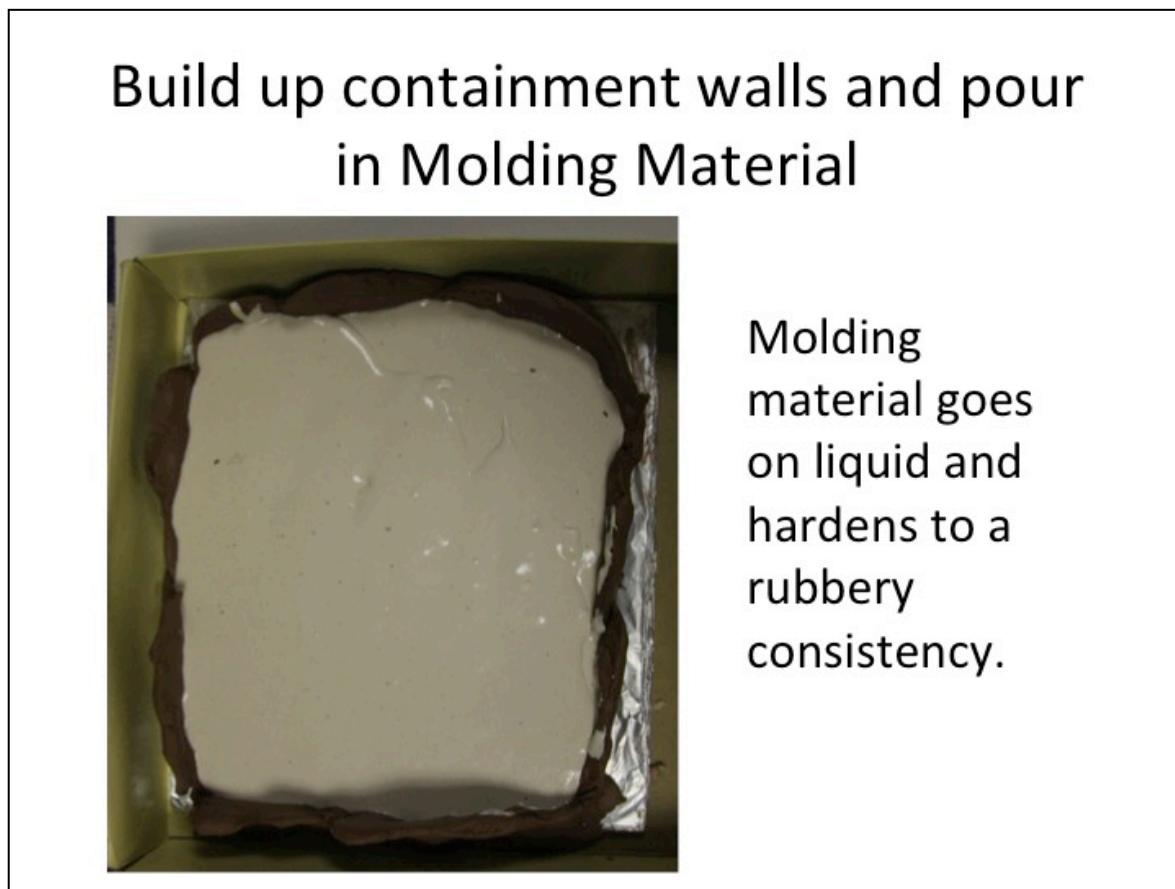


Figure 10. Example of Power Point Content

telling. Then we viewed and discussed Marc Chagall's *I and the Village* (1911) and *Paris Through My Window* (1913). I had done a sample of a preliminary drawing, the carving in clay, the mold making with the molding material and the casting with plaster. I photographed all the

stages and put them into a PowerPoint presentation to show students the process and what to expect. (See Figure 10.) I thought I had it all worked out. I was wrong. I had never worked with this particular molding material so I didn't know how far the material could be stretch. I did not limit the size of students' models or calculate correctly how much material would be needed for the class of 25 that I thought would be a class of 15. I didn't train the students well enough to properly mix their own plaster for pouring into the molds so most crumbled apart when they



Figure 11. *Student Stories Of Me* Art Project Example, 2012

finally dried or came out so hard that the cast couldn't be separated from the mold. It seemed nothing was going according to the plan. This then became a perfect opportunity to focus on how an artwork can take on an unexpected life of its own and what artists do when their plan doesn't work. This was a quick change in plans to create a new focus to make this disaster of a project have some meaning. The original essential concepts for this unit were that artists document important moments in history and in their life through their art, sculpture is painting in three dimensions and visual artists are often inspired by the literary arts. By the end of this unit we had added a few other essential concepts that guided our learning. Those new concepts were the following. Art and designs often change before they are complete. Artists often have to rework their design for a variety of technical and creative reasons.

I think the most important concepts students learned were that when things don't work out the way you originally planned them, you have to adapt and change your plan in order to achieve your goal. We joked about having a plan A, B, and C and then about changing the

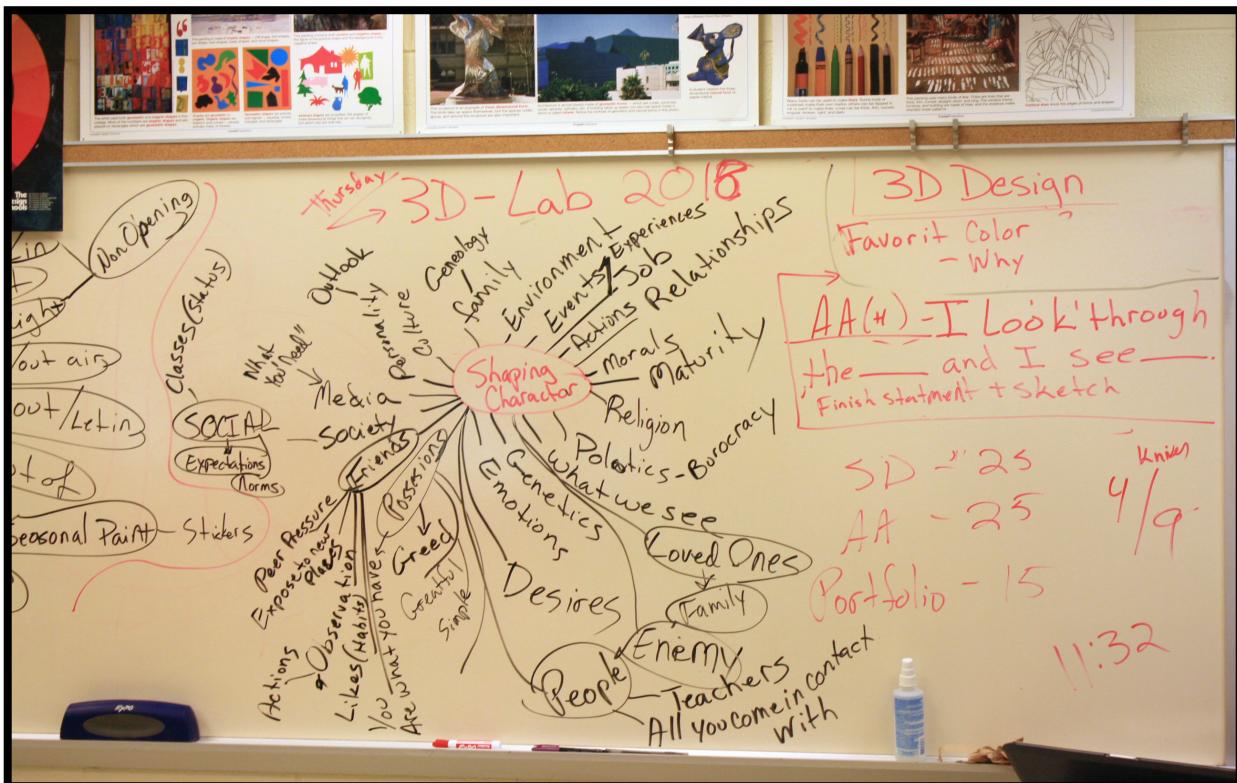


Figure 12. 1st Quarter Group Brainstorming Detail

meaning and purpose of the artwork. In the end every student had a piece of artwork that was somehow different from what they had intended. Admittedly, most of them looked pretty bad but there were a few that students were able to make work with some creative problem solving. (See Figure 11.) When I first reflected on what I considered a failure all I could see is what went wrong. I can sum it up in one word: preparation. I had established the essential questions and concepts. I had worked backwards in planning what I wanted them to learn and how I would get there. The motivation for creating art varied amongst students but all had a choice to tell whatever story they wanted to tell. I do realize that I should have required students to write their story or poem before beginning the artwork. I was trying to allow students the freedom to develop their concept either through drawing first or writing. However, I did not at this point know which of my students brainstormed best through images or text. I had thought that the brainstorming and mind mapping (see Figure 12) we had done as a class during the first quarter and through the first major project about identity formation and personal and communal interests, dreams, fears, hopes and histories would carry over into this second project. However, many students in the second quarter quickly forgot the applications of concepts used in the first quarter. This made me stop and question myself again. Why could they not utilize a planning technique taught previously with this new project? Maybe I should have made them copy down what we as a class created. Maybe I needed to walk them through it again. Maybe I should have discussed the Hastings poem further. Maybe they needed to see more narrative artworks to begin understanding how an artwork can tell a story literally or metaphorically. Questions like these are the kinds of questions I asked, and many teachers ask themselves when trying to figure out where the gaps in learning are created.

The final step in every project was for my students to complete a self-assessment of their artwork and a written reflection about their experiences creating it and what they learned through the process. This is their second level of reflection. After I looked at a student's completed artwork I read their self-assessment and reflection. This often gave me new insight into their thinking and cognitive level. I found that what and how they wrote about their art and what they learned, was reflected in their completed artwork. Only after I have looked, read, and relooked do I formally assess their artwork. I used the same rubric I gave students to assess their own work. Mostly I've found that students assess themselves harder than I do but then they also justify why they should get a higher grade with weak statements like, "I tried hard on this", "I like the way it looks", and "I followed the directions" (Students written statements were taken from project reflections, 2012).

While these statements were typical of most of my 3D I had expected the AA&H and PD students to be more in-depth. What I found however, was that only 40% of my combined AA&H students, and 45% of my PD students were able to write a self assessment and artwork reflection that exhibited a concentrated focus to details, aspects of critical thinking, creative interpretations and valid justifications for their decision making processes and the grade they should earn. This made me take a closer look at my student population. The forty percent (40%) of AA&H students that could constantly demonstrate a complex level of reflectivity were the students I taught the year before in Art III, which we no longer offer. That class was a very challenging art history, research, and studio experiences. The other 60% of students came from an Art II class or transferred in from a different school system. The gap in art educational background of these students was directly evident in their writing, as well as their discussions and art making. I will further discuss this in the next chapter. Forty five percent of the PD students I had taught

previously in Art III, IV or both. The other 65% of PD students I had taught previously for two years in Photography. That is a number that made me realize I need to improve my instruction in photography as well if I want to train *all* my students to be critical and reflective thinkers with the ability to appreciate art and create meaningful artworks themselves.

Throughout the school year the student's written reflections improved. By the end of the third quarter I read more statements like this one from the animal/human transformation 3D project, "I chose this animal because it best represents me. A deer stands for loyalty, strength and tranquility. I believe these are the qualities I possess." I read fewer reflections with statements like this: "My artwork is good because I like it and think it is pretty." While I think the "because I like it" validation of artwork as successful in the eyes of the student will continue to be the first and most predominant answer to the question "Why do you think your artwork is successful?" I think that the majority of my students learned ways to better justify their opinion with information from their artwork and understandings of their processes. I see this growth as a direct reflection of modeling what to look for in an artwork, how to communicate about an artwork, and repetition in the opportunity to practice those observation and reflection skills.

The information I gained from the student reflections at the end of the year brought about powerful realizations for me. This wasn't the first time I had utilized a year-end course evaluation, but it was the first time I put them all together and looked for patterns across classes. After I overcame the daunting task of hand counting responses for three classes, calculating totals and finding the percentages of a twenty-five question multiple-choice evaluation, I found interesting patterns of similarity and disjuncture across classes. ([See Appendix B.](#)) The evaluations also included open-ended questions so the student could write in their observations, opinions and suggestions about their course and instructor. I stressed to the students that these

evaluations were completely anonymous, that I valued their input, and that their comments could help make the next year's class better.

I expected to find lower ratings from my 3D class than from my AA&H and PD classes. I was adapting a previously designed curriculum with the Advanced Art students and I was creating a new curriculum with the 3D Design students. The learning curve for me was higher with the 3D class. While I did predict that I would find that students did not like the "academic" portions of the class (researching before creating and writing reflections), I was not as prepared to see just how much the Advanced Art and Portfolio Development students appreciated their freedom to choose their specific subject matter when it was presented to them. Because I allowed them to deviate from *my* planned projects to create something that was their own but that still demonstrated their understanding of the overarching concept made them feel respected and empowered (Personal communication with AA student, 2012).

From the course evaluations my students submitted I also learned the following.

- Students don't like to write about their work or how they created it.
- Students don't like listening to social drama from other students during class.
- Students who are more interested in socializing in class are said by other students to be annoying and distracting to their classmates.
- Students said that I set high standards and challenged them, but that the challenge was appreciated.
- Students want to see more artist examples relating to the current concept.
- Talking about student work is difficult for many students.
- I need more contemporary and engaging artists in my instruction. Some of the artworks they learned about were said by students to be "boring".

- The artists I did teach and the videos that were shown helped students understand the concepts we were working with.
- Students who were active participants learned things they could apply to other classes or their personal lives.
- Students were mostly interested in the topics we explored.
- Students who were not interested in the topics were the same students who stated that they did not put forth their best effort and were not always active participants in their own education.
- Students knew what was expected of them.
- Students did not like having large class numbers and thought that it made it difficult to have good class discussions and individual help when needed.
- Having more than one class going on at the same time in the same classroom makes it hard for students to focus and hard for the teacher to meet every one's needs.
- Students thought I was knowledgeable in the course content and encouraging.
- I was available for extra help when needed.
- Students believed that grading was fair.
- The class was well structured but students still had some freedom.
- Students liked learning about what other people and societies view as important.
- Most students were proud of what they created. Students that were not proud were the same students who stated they did not put forth their best effort and were not always active participants in their own education.

- Many students think that if they try hard and do the work they should earn an A or B.
- Some projects need longer time.
- Students want more variety in media and more freedom to do what they want.
- The students appreciated having more choice in what and how they wanted to create their art.
- Students would recommend the class to others.
- Most of my instructions were clear.
- I pushed students to step out of their comfort zone and try something new.
- Students learned not to give up on their artwork when it's not working out but to transform it into something new.
- It is hard for students to decide on their own how to develop their artwork.
- Sometimes students just need to make something “cool” that doesn’t have to have some deep meaning or serve another purpose. AKA: Create *Art* for *Arts* sake.
- Students learned to think more about the meanings of artwork and what they are creating.

After calculating how many students responded with the same rating on the same questions I realized there are things I need to do more of and that need to change. I will discuss those in Chapter 5.

Change

There is a sign on my photography classroom door that says, “It takes a negative to develop a positive” This relates to much more than just photography. It applies to many aspects of education and life in general. The process of developing a photographic negative requires a

chemical reaction in order to create a positive print. Something must change. This is the same in education.

This school year was full of changes. A new school administration, new duties as department chair, a new art teacher in the department, teaching three of the four new classes offered in the department, larger class sizes, larger variety in student interests and abilities, less money for supplies, less time for planning, more school duties, and completing an online graduate program have all contributed to this theme within my research. The majority of these changes, while they did set the stage for my year, are not the most significant changes that I have experienced. The most significant changes are actually the little ones that any good teacher makes on a daily basis but that have a great impact on student engagement in learning. The little changes that bring new understandings are often overlooked or seen as insignificant in the grander scheme of teaching. It is the changes that happen when you must think quickly on your feet to “save” a lesson from disaster, “re-hook” a student who is loosing interest in the lesson, or change the planned materials because they have gone bad, you’ve miscalculated the amount you needed, or they just aren’t working.

These are the changes that I faced with a unit in my 3D Design class. I was very excited about getting to design and teach a new class, even if I was only informed about my assignment two months before I was to teach it. There was no curriculum for the 3D class; I was going to have to construct it as I went along. In the words of educator Craig Roland, I was “constructing the plane as it flies” (Personal communication, 2011).

I decided to utilize a big ideas and essential concepts curriculum approach (Stewart &



Figure 13. 3D Design Students Engaged In A Group Balance Construction Activity At The Beginning Of The School Year, 2011

Walker, 2005, Wiggins & McTighe, 2006) along with a backwards design methodology (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) for creating units of instruction for a yearlong curriculum based on

the overreaching theme of Identity. There is so much that could fit under this thematic umbrella that I figured I'd have room for great variety in artists, techniques and lesson for the year. I created a basic scope and sequence for the course and rough unit outlines ([see my website](#)), designed the year's opening activities (see Figure 13) to jump start the creative problem solving that would be needed all year, planned the first unit and set about making a sample piece. The

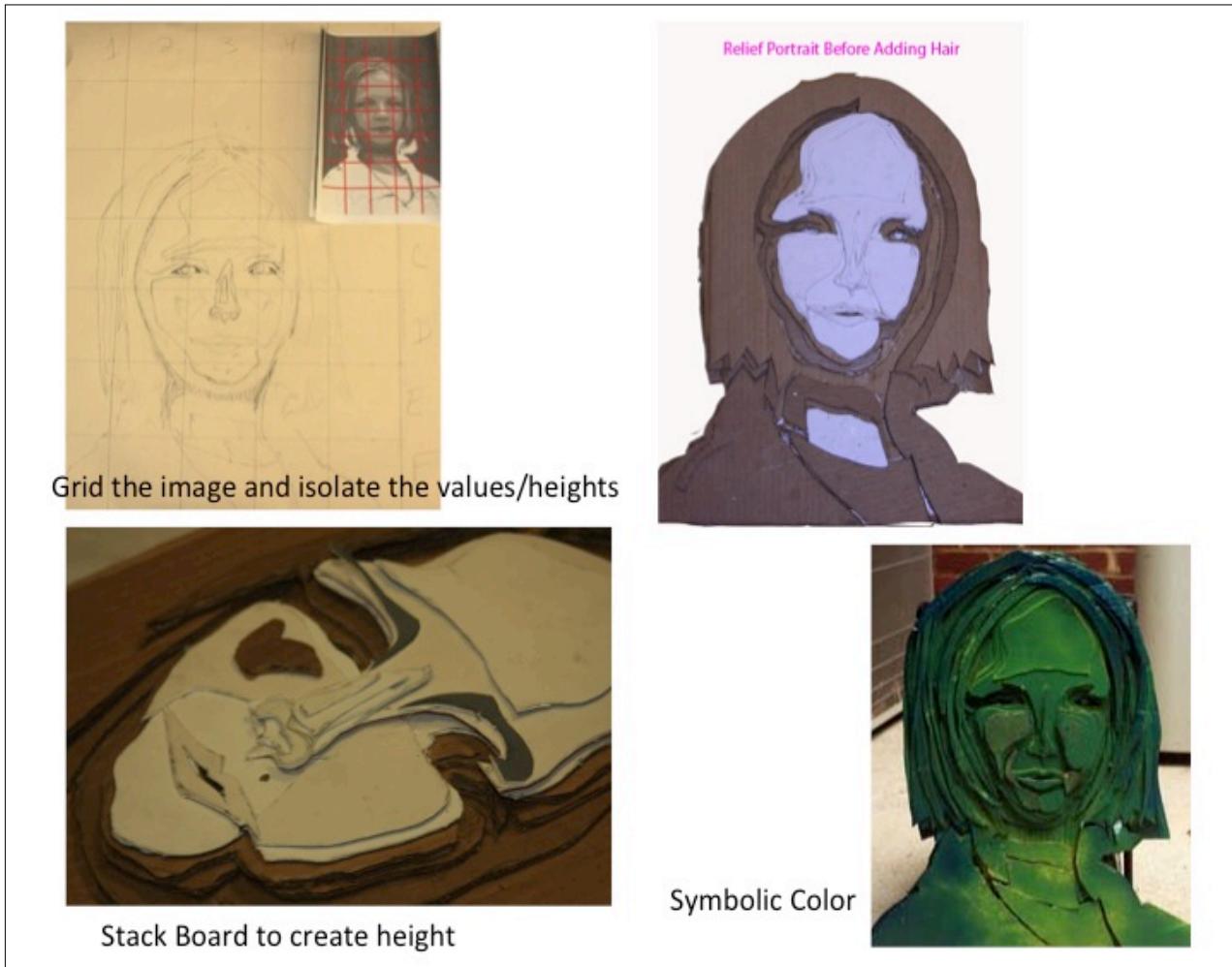


Figure 14. The Abandoned First Project (See Blog at <http://artedreflections.blogspot.com/2011/09/restarts-and-reflections.html>)

first project, titled *Layers of Me*, was going to be a relief portrait. I had the unit plan all worked

out and I went about making the sample using cardboard pieces for creating layers to build up the face. spent hours on this trying to get it to actually look something like the photograph. After much frustration, and reflection I dumped the project entirely (See Figure 14). At that point I had only a few days before I had to get my students creating something. So I returned to my digital folder of lesson ideas I had found on various art supply websites. That's when *Layers of Me* changed from a relief portrait to a mixed media collage using the student's initials (See Figure 15).

The concepts of the portrait in art and using color symbolically remained with the new art



Figure 15. 3D Student *Layers Of Me* Project, 2011

project. However, the idea of a portrait was further investigated beyond the literal. Collage was brought in and the symbolic nature of color was reinforced and carried further. Students also ended up with more freedom in imagery. This project, and unit as a whole, went well and it also served to build students' confidence in creating.

I have learned over the last 14 years of teaching that it is vital to create the project yourself first or something like it, before you present the process to students. This serves two purposes. It gives you an example and it gives you a better understanding of the issues that may arise, the difficulties student may face, and how long it will take to complete. However, in the real world of classroom dynamics, teachers can't always do that. Sometimes you just have to go with it and figure it out along with the students. I had to *just go with it* this year with one of the 3D projects.

With the *Stories of Me* project I had worked out the kinks of the process when I created my sample. This was the first time I had used this material for making a mold for casting. By the size of the bucket and the amount that I used to make the sample I thought I had enough for all my students. I was wrong, but I didn't figure that out until students were ready to make their molds. I had a large bag of plaster, which we then used that to make the molds. After showing students how to mix the plaster I let them continue on their own while I helped other students with their original models. I realized too late that this was not a good idea. I realized the problem too late and the plaster molds weren't working because the mixture either was poured having too much water in it, or students had let the mix sit to long (waiting on me they said) that it was too hard to spread and use as a mold making material. Molds fell apart. Most of the molds that didn't fall apart did in the next step. To make the positive of the mold we used another type of plaster. Again, the same mixing issues happened, but to a lesser degree. The students (a great majority)

forgot the step of painting the releasing agent on the mold and the two plasters bonded. That meant the mold had to be chiseled off. This resulted in a disastrous mess for most students. To say that the final products looked totally different from the original designs or models is an understatement. We were all happy to see this unit come to a close. Even with as many changes of materials, designs, and construction methods as there were and as frustrated as many of us became, something good did come out of all this. A new understanding of the importance of patience, perseverance, flexibility and adaptability was gained for my students and myself. This is reflected in their writing on their end of unit reflection and assessment. (See Appendix C for student responses.)

I had to think quickly on my feet during direct instruction quite a bit this year as I navigated through brand new classes. However, peeking in through my classroom window you could not see the biggest change that occurred. That change couldn't be immediately seen because it was buried in my journal and computer, or in my head. The biggest change was in the way I planned my classes and how I built in more student options. When I set the essential concepts for each unit of instruction I realized that there were numerous ways I could go about guiding students in learning those concepts. As I learned from Eisner (1984) and Bolin (1996) I couldn't do them all. Once the essential concepts were established I had to narrow down my instruction of media and techniques to those that would meet my state standards, the students would enjoy, and would call for materials I had on hand, or that I had the budget to buy the necessary supplies. That last one seemed to be a larger influence than I wanted it to be, but that is the reality of teaching in a public school.

By the time I was into the fourth week of school I realized that the curriculum I had previously designed from my Advanced Art and Honors combined class was not going to work.

The artistic skills and academic abilities of this group of student were too varied to be able to jump into an advanced level of instruction or artistic production. I had to reevaluate my approach to instruction for this class. I wrote the following in my blog on November 7, 2011,

I'm working the curriculum I wrote last year, but that curriculum was written for the advanced art student. I have a split class this year. The students who had me for Art III are prepared for the level of instruction and art creation expected from an advanced student. But I have at least 1/3rd of the class that does not have either the artistic skill or the creative skills that they should have in this type of course. So I have to rethink my expectations and approach to instruction. I had not planned on spending 2 weeks in exploring watercolor, acrylic and oil. Rather, the plan was to go straight to oil. I have too many students in this class that don't understand paint enough to begin a painting in oil. What I've decided to do is allow time for experimentation in the three painting medias and then allow students to choose which one they are most comfortable with to create their final artwork.

(Wirt, S., Teaching Journal, November 7, 2011)

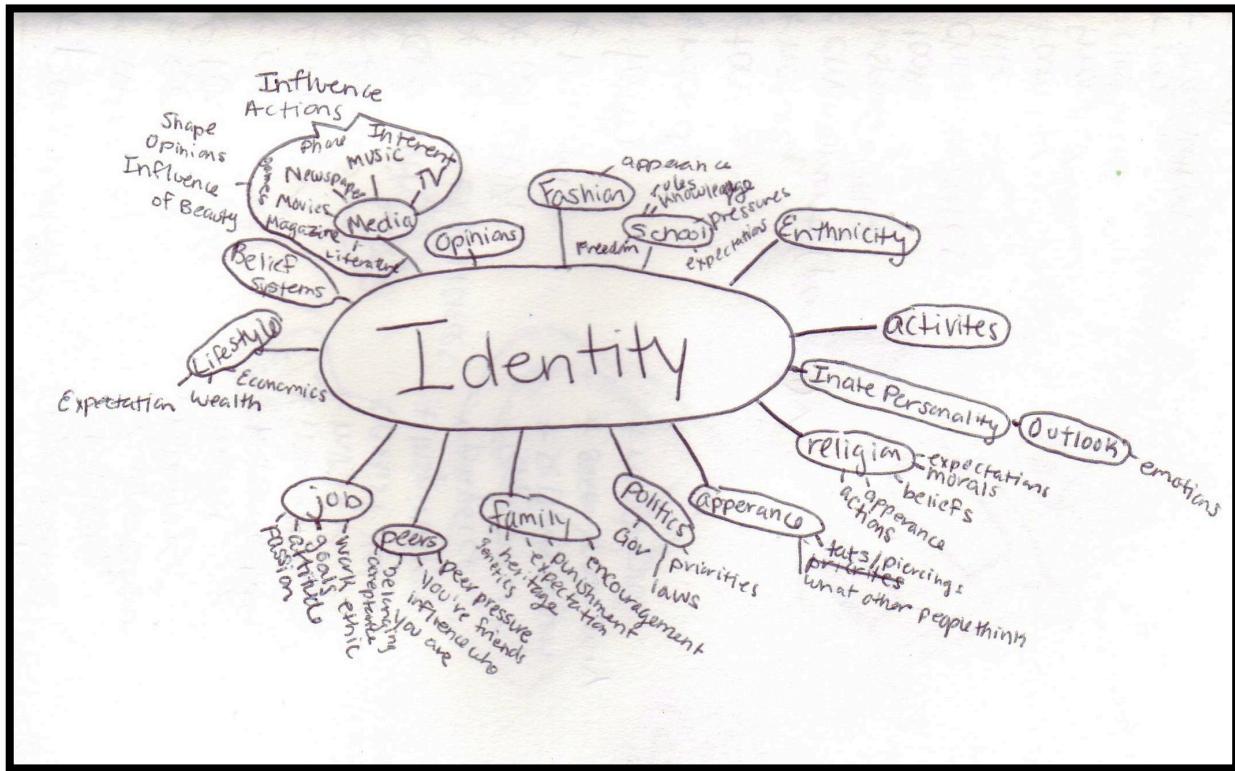


Figure 16. Student Sketchbook Page

The scope and sequence I had created, which fit into my division's standards, was not realistic on two levels. First, It was media driven and was structured like the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) model. Second it did not correlate to the artistic, developmental or academic level of my current student population. The vision I had in my head was not what was on paper. So I threw out the paper. I started over by designing each quarter around one aspect of what students had identified as contributing to their sense of identity (See Figure 16). Thankfully I already had some quality instructional materials and plans that were apart of that original curriculum that I just needed to tweak a bit to make work for my current students (See <http://www.wirtartalk.org/advanced-art-2nd-quarter.html>).

The most significant change that I made with my AA&H student can be summarized in one word. That word is *choice*. Students had the choice of what to create and how to create

within the parameters of the concepts we were working in. With a wide range of interests and

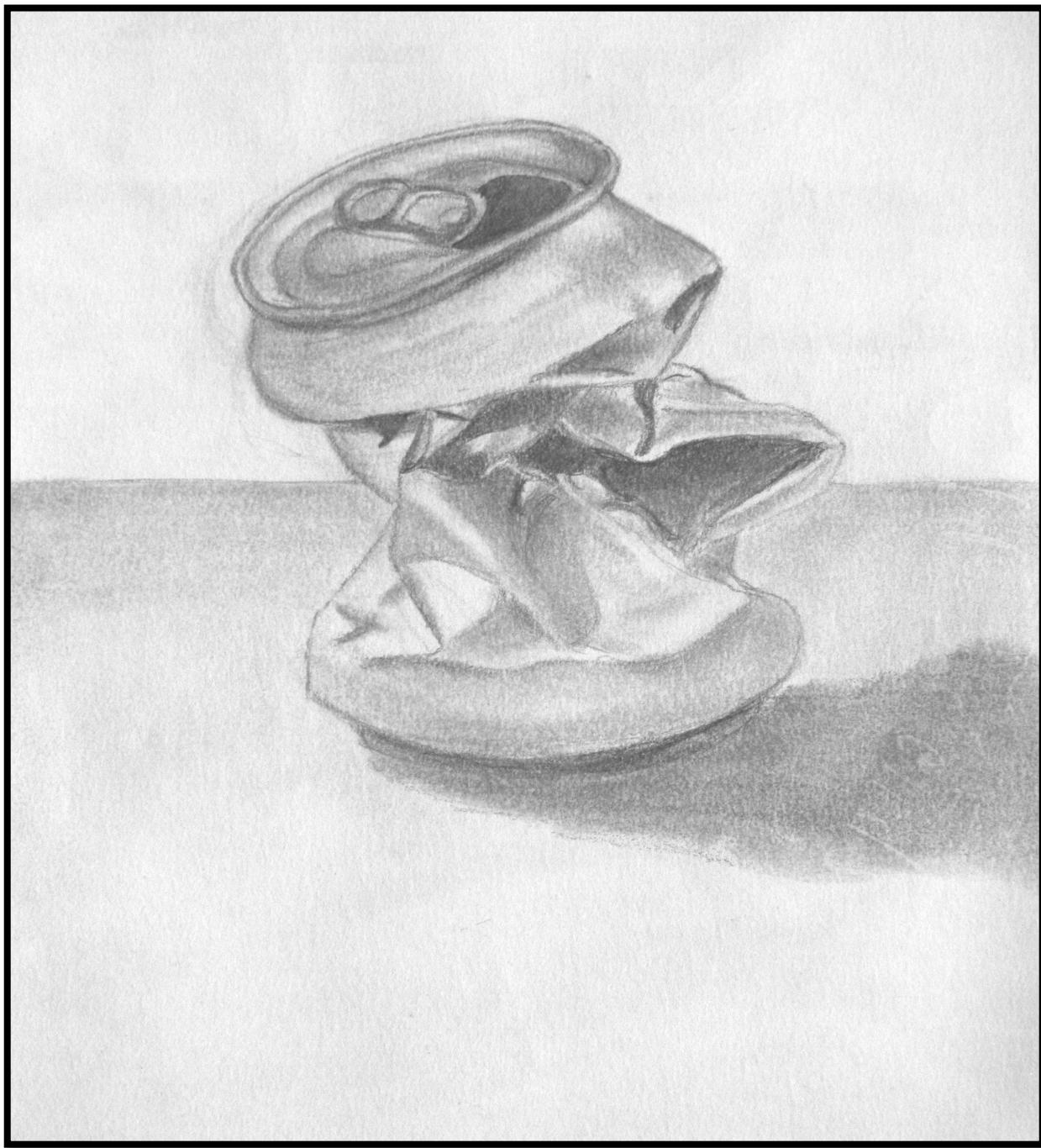


Figure 17. (AA) Student Sketchbook Sample

abilities in one classroom there needed to be room for students to find success. I have always given sketchbook assignments in my art classes, but this year I decided that I would not mandate everything the students were to create. At the beginning of each quarter I gave students the

sketchbook assignment (See Figure 17) sheet with at least 20 options of things they could choose to create out side of class. Students had to complete at least 3 artworks from the list for each deadline. There were always ‘free choice’, realism, expressive, imaginary, digital, social commentary and current event options. If a student came to me (which happened often) with an idea of something they wanted to explore that was not on the list then I allowed the substitution. Twice a quarter those artworks were assessed. I also changed the way I graded them. Instead of giving one grade for all the work, I gave one grade for meeting the deadline, and one grade (with a larger weight) for the artwork itself. Art students work at different paces. I did not want to be penalizing great work for a missed deadline. Deadline grades (Professionalism) became a separate grading category.

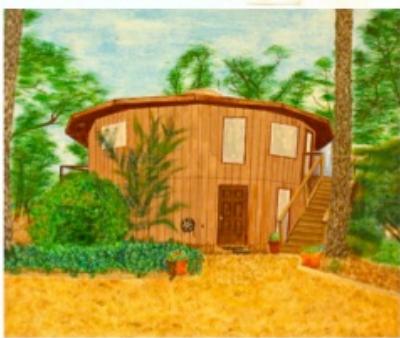
Beyond changing my outlook on grading and given students more choice with their outside of class assignments, I encouraged each student to develop their own interpretation of the concept were exploring in each unit (See Figure 18). No two artworks produced looked the same, and students found success in the media and techniques they chose to use.

The result of my throwing out the pre-designed curriculum scope and sequence was a year filled with students creating art they were proud of, that ranged from the literal to the metamorphic and from the realistic to the abstract and that were not cookie cutter projects. ([See my Website for examples of student artwork.](#)) This proved to me that making changes in curriculum, what is included or excluded would always need to be done. However, if teachers have quality lessons, visuals, and other instructional resources on hand, making the necessary changes to meet the needs of the current student won’t be such a daunting task.

How do artists express their identity?



**Advanced Art & Honors
Self Portrait Projects**



Media Used:
Acrylic
Oil
Sand
Collage
Assemblage

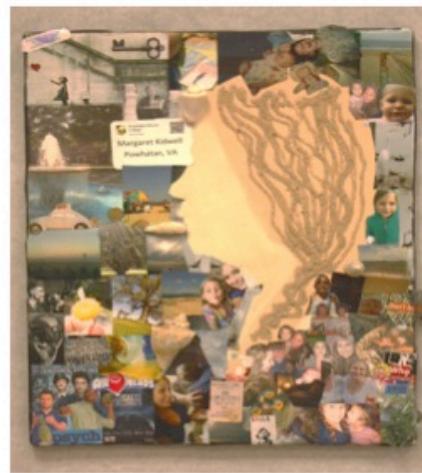


Figure 18. (AA&H) Student Self Portrait Examples

Theory Versus Praxis

The complexity of real world public education creates the difference between educational theory and the actual praxis of teaching and learning. An essential difference between theory and reality is experience and reflection. Through my experiences this year, as well as over the last 14 years of teaching, I have found many differences between theory and reality when it comes to the day-to-day teaching and learning in a high school art classroom. By looking back on what I had planned versus what I actually did in the classroom this year I realized that I had also created my own gaps between theory about how things should progress and how they actually did.

The reality of teaching art is as complex as the workings of a teenager's brain. Teachers are pulled in many different directions. From conversations with other teachers and looking back on my own experiences I've found that actually teaching art sometimes gets put at the end of the line on any given school day. Things that inhibit teachers from focusing on their teaching are as follows. There is bus, hall and lunch duty. There are days when planning periods are spent in committee meetings or covering another class because there aren't enough substitutes. Classes are interrupted for a variety of school activates like fire drills, lock downs, concerts and state standardized testing schedules. Students are pulled out of class for not meeting dress code or sent to In School Suspension (ISS) because of too many tardies. Half the class is missing because of a field trip for another class on the day you are supposed to introduce a new lesson. You have to stay after school to teach what you did 2 weeks prior for the kid who was suspended. The principal expects to see great student artwork hanging in the halls by week 2 of school. You're expected to follow a format that doesn't work for your particular students. You spend half a class period talking about the fight in the hallway before you can get your students to focus back on their art. The drama of the high school social scene makes its way into the classroom and inhibits students from focusing on anything else. You have students who just don't want to be there and make it difficult for others. It is amazing how one student can affect an entire class. The administration sometimes doesn't support you when you need to have a student removed or when a parent complains because their "perfect child" didn't make an A on their project. The ability level within one class is so varied that you end up making separate assignments for multiple groups within one class. The technology you have come to depend on breaks. There are all kinds of things that put a halt to teaching on any given day or inhibit students from fully participating in their own education. That's just reality.

Educators and theorists Cary (2008), Gude (1997, 2004, 2012), Noddings, (2008), Smith (1996, 2000), Stewart and Walker (2005), and Wiggins (1989) have postulated that the best way to get students engaged in learning is to make instruction relevant to their life. That also means that instruction should be focused around real world issues we face as global citizens each day (Delacruz, 2009). Through conversations with my educational colleagues, I can attest that most educators realize the validity of that theory. However, subscribing to that theory in practice is not as simple as believing in it.

Making instruction relevant to the life of today's learner is not as simple as it sounds. It requires that the teacher continuously reevaluate their content presentation, methods, learning activities, and instructional materials as the student population continues to change. (Fitchman & Yendol-Hoppey in Grove, 2009; Smith 1996, 2000). Using outdated instructional materials such as visuals, textbooks, information handouts and assessment tools, along with traditional lecture, assignment, assessment, does not necessarily support the concept of relevancy to the life of the 21st century learner (Wirt, 2011). The notion of the Elements and Principles of Art as the fundamentals of art education is an outdated theory. To focus on those as the foundations of art education is no longer relevant to the 21st century student. Today's students need relevant concepts as the foundation for their art education (Gude, 2010).

Prior to this study I knew the above to be true. Teaching high school art for the last 14 years has taught me its truth. My quest this year was to put these theories into practice with intentional focus in my planning and instruction, and by paying attention to my students' engagement. Utilizing the Backwards Design model to create my instructional units helped me focus on the most important concepts to explore and activities to incorporate. However, as I progressed with delivering instruction my printed plans became annotated with sticky notes of

the changes that had to be made due to changes in the school day, attitudes and interests of students and time constraints imposed by school and life schedule changes. I will use the following chart to illustrate the difference between these theories and the reality of teaching.

Theory	Reality
1. Art is an elective. The students in those classes chose to be there because they want to learn about art.	30% of HS art students either did not choose to be in the class or chose it because they thought it would be an easy grade.
2. Art students are placed in classes according to ability.	Students are placed in classes according to how many seats can be filled with similar student abilities.
3. Art class is all about making art	Making art, while very important is only a part of art education. I spent a great deal of time teaching observation, communication, inquiry, and critical thinking skills through small and large group discussions, individual and group inquiry, class critiques and student self assessments.
4. Teachers have enough planning time to sufficiently prepare for their classes.	There is never enough planning time. Teachers have more responsibilities throughout the school day that take away time from preparing for instruction.
5. Educators are the authority on what constitutes relevant content, instructional materials and methods.	My students informed me about what was relevant to their lives when we began the year with the identity map. From this map I was able to further focus my instruction to make it relevant to them. My students introduced me to artists and technologies that I did not know but that were relevant to their instruction and learning. I was then able to incorporate that new knowledge into my classroom praxis.

6. A good curriculum can be followed by any teacher and can be used year after year.	There is no such thing as a teacher proof curriculum. Curriculum is a living document and must change as the student population changes. Curriculum is a guide for instruction and learning not a document set in stone.
7. A well-planned lesson will go smoothly and can be repeated with the same expected results.	Even the best planned lessons can go wrong because of variables such as the student population and supply access changing often. A well-prepared teacher must be able to think quickly on their feet and make changes on the spot to adapt to the conditions at hand.
8. Utilizing a specific format (like the Backwards Design model) for developing units and lessons will ensure the essential concepts will be understood or achieved by the end of the unit as it was planned.	Backwards Design is only a guide. It gives the teacher a structure for planning. If the students can't relate to content, the lesson will be unsuccessful.
9. Understanding can be systematically assessed.	There is a difference between knowledge and understanding. (Walker, 2001) Knowledge indicates recall of specific information. Understanding indicates the demonstration in application and transference of knowledge. Understanding requires repeated opportunities to apply knowledge in different situations. (Ex; students demonstrated that they understood how to reflect on, and assess, their artwork after repeating the process of writing throughout the year.)
10. One single theme can unify an entire year of instruction.	A single theme must be large enough to be broken down into smaller areas of focus in order to adequately explore important areas of relationship. Focusing on the same idea all year long students become disinterested and the relevance of the theme becomes diminished.

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, the greatest amount of knowledge gained through this study has been assimilated into the overreaching themes of *difference between theory*

and practice when it comes to the realities of teaching high school art in the 21st century, dimensions of reflectivity, and change. My students taught me more about what is important. I realized that planning high quality units of instruction using the Backwards Design model gives me a structure to follow, but that ultimately I must be prepared with contemporary instructional resources that are engaging to my students and be ready to change my plans in an instant.

Chapter 5 Narrative Summary

After this year of research into my classroom praxis I have developed a greater understanding and appreciation for what it means to be a prepared and effective teacher that continues to engage students in learning. In this chapter I will discuss the impact of my journey to understanding.

My journey has been one of twists and turns, unexpected stops, detours and discoveries. Looking in the rear view mirror helps put into perspective the road ahead. In reflecting on that journey, I realize that it is not, nor do I think it will ever be, complete. This state of incompleteness is due to the fact that everything in life changes, even the intended destination. In the words of the poet, Robert Hastings in his poem *The Station*, there is “no one place to arrive at after all. The true joy in life is the trip. The station is only a dream. It constantly outdistances us.” (N.D.) Translated to education: There is no one grand plan that will guarantee an art curriculum will engage all students and always be relevant to the contemporary learner. That is because the learner, and the value systems of contemporary culture, will continue to change. Even with this understanding, striving towards the ideal destination of more engaging and effective art instruction will only continue to improve art education.

There are ideologies and instructional methods that do promote student engagement and present them with opportunities to construct their own knowledge. Those methods relate to the teacher’s instructional planning, the actual day-to-day actions of teaching; including the choices made in instructional resources to be included, techniques used to spark the interests of the art student, and the act of simply paying attention to what the students say and do.

Eisner wrote in 2001 “The teaching of art is about more than the teaching of art.” (p.10) I completely agree with this statement. Actual time spent in direct instruction did not surmount the

time spent in planning, observing and interacting with my students this year. What this proves to me is that planning for instruction, and having a plan ‘B’, is of great importance to student learning. Teaching is learning. Learning involves paying attention to the small changes you make, reflecting on why and how you did something, how your actions affected student learning, as well as watching and listening to what is happening in the lives of your students. Richard Cary set forth in his book *Critical Art Pedagogy: Foundations for postmodern art education* that a good teacher must also be a philosopher of teaching; always taking a critical look at methods of instruction, needs of learners and fostering a humanistic approach to constructing knowledge. (Cary, 1998)

The Power of Reflection

The act of reflecting on one’s instruction is not a single event, but it is something repeated throughout the year. The first time we look back on our instruction, or evidence of student learning, we can only see the single episode. By taking time to look back on what was just finished, how it was done, why it was done, and what was learned from the process of doing it, allows the student to pull together all the bits and pieces and construct new knowledge. It allows the teacher space to determine if the unit needs to be reworked before teaching it again. At the end of the next unit when the opportunity presents itself to reflect again there is now more information that can be used to identify patterns and find growth within our students and our instruction. Over time we get to know our students, their abilities, their attitudes and interests, and more realistic expectations of our students can be realized. This does not mean that we as teachers should lower our standards. Rather it means that we may need to re-evaluate *how* we are

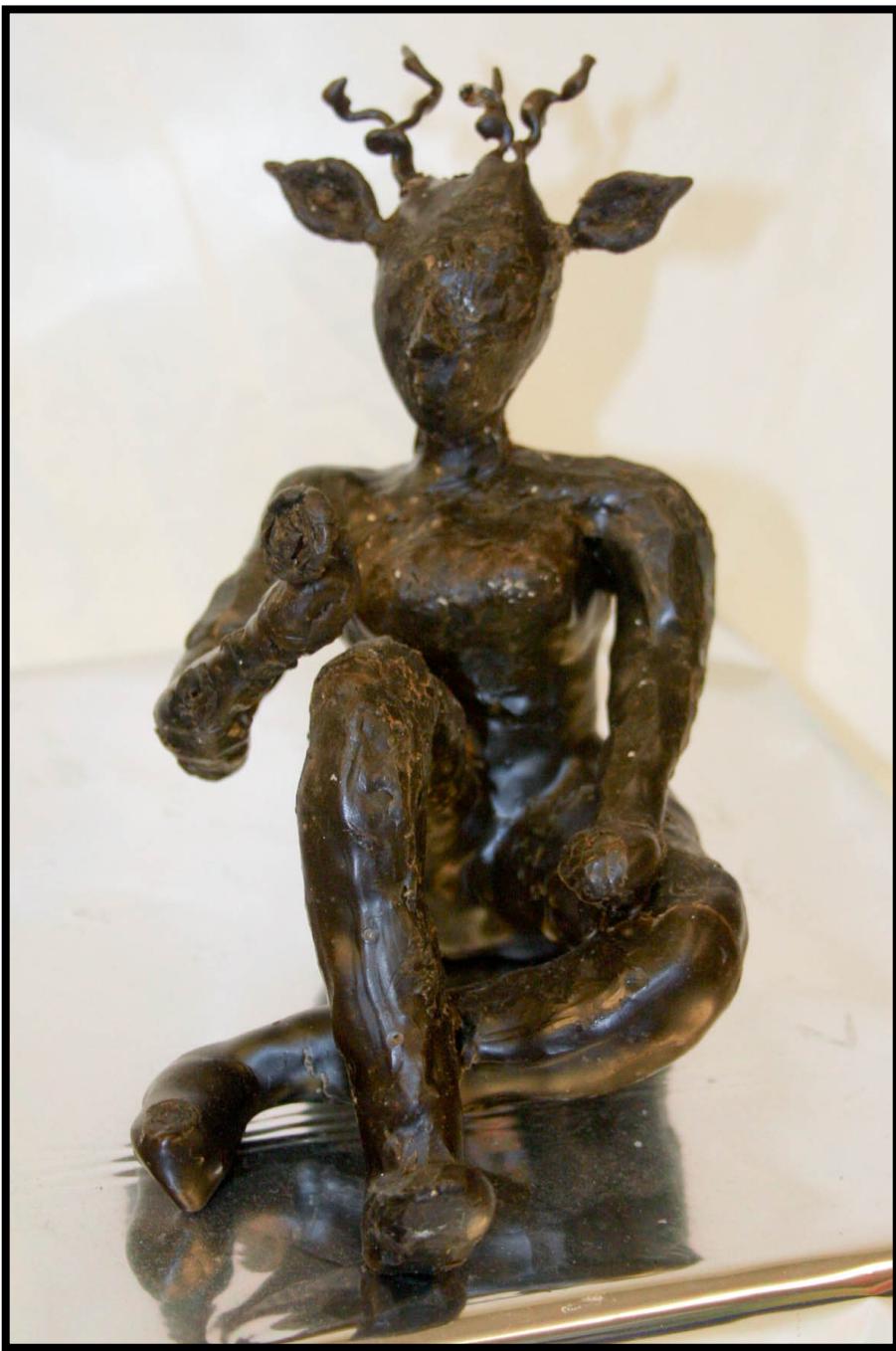


Figure 19. *The Deer And Me*. 3D Design Student Wax Sculpture, 2012

leading students to construct their own knowledge and *if* we are really making instruction

relevant to our students' lives.

Adolescence can be a turbulent time for our students. During this time students are trying to find their place in the world. The pressures and expectations placed on them in so many areas of their life can be overwhelming. I chose the theme if Identity as a unifying concept for both my instruction and as a way to help students make connections between art and their own life.

Personal identity is something that is constructed throughout our lifetime and is impacted by all our experiences. Some of those experiences can diminish or what good qualities of character



Figure 20. 3D Design Student Power Point Slide, 2012

students see in themselves. Art cannot only help students to express their identity but also to navigate through those experiences that have, and continue to, shape their view of self.

Many of my students made profound statements about their views of themselves and the world they live in through their artwork and reflective writing this year. Their statements, along with the art they created, prove to me that a thematic curriculum design, based on the theme of identity is a worthwhile unifying concept for both instruction and students' personal growth. I'd like to share just a few of those from the 3D Design and Advanced Art & Honors classes here.

The 3D Design *Transformation* unit resulted in a graphic (Figure 19) of a chosen animal with its symbolic meaning, a wax sculpture that combined animal and human characteristics and a written fictional story with the new animal/human creature as the main character. However, there was one student who felt more connected to the symbolic qualities of a tree and used it in substitution for an animal. (See website <http://www.wirtartalk.org/unit-3-transformation.html>)



Figure 21. *The Tree of Me* 3D Design Student Wax Sculpture, 2012

The student who chose a deer (Figure 18) as her animal wrote,

I chose this animal because it best represents me. A deer stands for loyalty, strength, and tranquility. I believe these are some of the qualities that I possess. I combined a deer head with a human body. I kept the animal head to signify that even though the sculpture has a human body it thinks like and has the same qualities as the animal it represents.

The student who combined a tree (Figure 20) and a figure wrote

I chose a tree because I couldn't find an animal that fit me. I believe the trunk is strong and broad as if to keep my ties with my homeland but the branches reach out for different places I'd like to see. My family keeps me grounded to the earth and gives me the strength to keep following the sun. (Student written reflection, 2012)

By the end of the year the Advanced Art and Honors students had created a series of artworks based on their view of self and what was most important in their lives. We had explored student personal histories, media influences on one's self image and what students believed were important moments, people and places in their lives. The final project was to be a self-portrait. We explored why and how self-portraits have been created. The discussion we had about what qualified as a self-portrait led to exploring the use of metaphors in creating art.



Figure 22. Advanced Art Student *Self Portrait*, Layered Mat Board and Acrylic Paint, 2012

The metaphor in art is a powerful tool for communicating concepts, which may be too personal to represent realistically. I found this year that when students realized that they did not have to be literal and realistic in all their artwork they were more willing to take chances without the fear of "messing it all up." The majority of the class chose to create metaphorical self-portraits because they felt it would express more about them than just what they looked like on the outside. One of my students, whom I will call Evan, was new to the school this year. He had been placed with a new foster family in public school. What I found remarkable about all Evan's artwork was the

sense of hope amidst darkness that came through in all his work. He wrote about the layers of his self-portrait (Figure 21) in his reflection.

I chose the structure of the canvas to show 'unorganization'. It also represents the "layers" people have that make them who they are. It is also very dark for the most part; adding mystery and sadness. The elephant is to represent a huge, obvious problem that just stays there but no one wants to deal with. The elephant is on top of a picture of a kid that is supposed to represent me. The kid kind of blends in with his background, which is what I've always felt I do. The mountain scene is above the scene of space to show that everything in my life has been kind of upside down? The red sky acts as a warning. It warns that something unknown is coming. Last but not least, the tree. The tree is there to represent growth. The growth of me: my maturity, and my mind. (Student Self Portrait Reflection, 2012)

Only three chose to create a traditional portrait showing their face. One of those students, whom I will call Lori, wanted to show how she is surrounded and protected by what was most important in her life; her Christian faith. She wrote about that faith in her reflection?

When I created myself portrait I wanted to communicate who I am through what I created. I



Figure 23. Advanced Art Honors Student Self Portrait, Acrylic, 30x36, 2012

outlined my face and hair with bible verses because I try to live my life by them and my faith makes me who I am.



Figure 24. Student Self Portrait Detail (2012)

Both of these students explored their sense of self but in different ways. When students have the freedom to explore a concept and tell their own story they gain a sense of empowerment

that allows them to make connections and changes in their lives. At the end of the school year one of my Portfolio Development students said to me,

Mrs. Wirt, I've never had a teacher let me figure out how I wanted to show what I know and who didn't always tell me what I had to create. You asked me what I thought and what things meant to me. Even though I got frustrated a lot because you wouldn't tell me the answers, and made me figure things out myself, you helped me realize I'm smarter and stronger than I thought I was. Thanks.

(Personal Communication, 2012)

Implications For The Future Of Art Education

Whoever said, "Education is not about the teaching, it's about the learning" was quite the wise philosopher. Wise in understanding that what the student learns is of most importance in their education, but a bigger concept was left out of that statement. What the student learns, and utilizes to create new knowledge is, influenced by a teacher at some point. What kind of influence do we as art educators want to be? Answering that question should, and does, lead us in how we plan and teach. Therefor, while education is about the student learning, it is just as much about what and how the teacher plans and teaches, that creates a quality education.

How teachers plan instruction is the work that no one sees, but is what makes student learning possible. Eisner wrote in 2005 that "No decision is of greater importance than determining what to teach and towards what end" (p. 8). For teacher planning to be productive and effective the teacher must be actively engaged in

- Identifying what is of most importance.
- Consulting the academic calendar for guidance in pacing instruction.

- It will usually take students longer to complete an art project than it does for you to make the sample
- Recognizing when our expectations of student ability are not the reality of the current situation and then adjusting instruction as needed.
- Knowing the level of the learner and recognizing when there is growth or more mentoring is needed.
- Gathering relevant visual and literary instructional resources.
- Utilizing Professional Learning Networks to maintain a global relationship with other art educators.
- Continuing to engage in professional development.
- Continuously seeking new relevant content.

Beyond presenting students with relevant material the teacher must also allow the students the room to discover how to apply their new knowledge. We can't present something as being a student inquiry opportunity if we are limiting the sources of information they may investigate. We must empower students by giving them the freedom to discover some things on their own. Our creative students will teach us with the things they find. We can direct students to credible information and guide them in determining what is useful, but we have to give them the room to make their own decisions and then hold them responsible for validating what they have learned. This means teachers will have to give up some control over how students demonstrate their understanding.

Essential Concepts Realized

Throughout this year of living the hectic life of a mother, wife, artist, student, teacher, and researcher I have learned many professional and life lessons. Below are some of those new things I have learned.

- Don't reinvent the wheel. Just make it roll smoother to carry a heavier load.
- What I needed all year was more readily available, and quickly accessible, contemporary artists, art examples, and information to spark my students' interest in art. I found those examples and information by utilizing emerging digital technologies. Art teachers around the globe are creating and sharing contemporary artist information that is directly applicable to high school art instruction. One such resource for relevant contemporary artist information is <http://teachart.org> (Ferrell, 2012). This site curates the work of contemporary artists that relate to concepts taught in high school art classes.
- Embracing emerging digital technologies will provide art teachers with lesson ideas, visual resources, advocacy information, new tools for creating art, and most importantly, a community of like-minded professionals with the same goal of improving art instruction and student learning.
- Creating and maintaining a professional website will allow teachers to share what works in their classroom with other art educators and contributes to the strength and power of the art education profession.
- Beginning with contemporary artists and then working backwards in art history is an effective method of linking the past with the present. I found that students gained a better understanding of art and social history when starting with what and how artists of today were creating and them going backwards through art history.

- I still believe the past is important in learning where we come from and to build a deeper appreciation for what we have now. However, what is needed now is building students' awareness of what is happening in the world around us. As an artist and art educator my world is art *and* education. My world is affected by my students' world.
- The Backwards Design process is a logical, systematic format to utilize when designing curriculum. When you the teachers know where you want to go, and you know where you're starting from, you are better able to plot a course to reaching your ultimate goal.
- There is one thing you can be certain will happen during curriculum design and that is change.
- What we think to be failures may actually be new understandings waiting to be realized.
- What students need more of is:
 - Specific instruction on how to reflect on what they have done, why they have done it and what it means.
 - Specific instruction on how to look at art – find the story.
 - Pushing beyond their first idea.
 - Specific step-by-step instructions for new processes. Sometimes what we as teachers think obvious, is not to our students.
 - Freedom to find their own answers to creative problems.
 - Consistency in instruction where what is expected of them is a known.
 - Instruction that relates the content to students' lives *and* other educational disciplines.

You will continue to redesign the route, adapting to traffic jams, scenic overlooks, pit stops, and wrong turns along the way. However, if you are constantly refueling yourself, and the

gas tank called teaching, you will be able to continue the journey. When we reflect on our own behaviors, instructional strategies and how our students respond to them we can determine if what we are doing and saying is making a positive impact, and if it isn't we much make a change.

As teachers we don't always know what kind of impact we are having on our students. I received a letter at the end of the school year from a student I had taught for the past three years. The final sentence of her letter really put into perspective what kind of teacher the 21st century learner needs, and should have. She wrote, "I want you to know that as a teacher you plant seeds too, and that you have impacted my education and life in such a great, positive way, and these lessons are things I will always carry with me" (Personal communication, 2012). See appendix for the full letter. In that letter she explained that I taught her the kind of the life lessons that can't be found in any art textbook. We as teachers need to always remember that we do more than teach art. We as teachers are engineers of the future.

Appendix A

Course Year End Student Assessment – Student Response Form

COURSE EVALUATION 2012

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS EVALUATION. PLEASE RETURN IT TO THE COLLECTION BOX BY THE CLASSROOM DOOR.

CLASS: _____ PERIOD: _____

STATEMENT	AGRE E (5)	SOMEWA T AGREE (4)	SOMETIM E S (3)	DISAGRE E (2)	STRONGL Y DISAGREE (1)	NO OPINIO N (0)
1. THE CONTENT OF THIS COURSE WAS WHAT YOU EXPECTED.						
2. MY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ART/PHOTOGRAPHY WAS INCREASED BY THIS COURSE.						
3. I LEARNED THINGS THAT I CAN APPLY IN OTHER SUBJECTS.						
4. I LEARNED THINGS THAT I CAN USE IN OTHER ASPECTS OF MY PERSONAL LIFE.						
5. I COULD RELATE TO THE ARTISTS & CONTENT PRESENTED IN THIS CLASS.						
6. I WAS INTERESTED IN THE TOPICS WE COVERED AND THE PROJECTS WE DID.						
7. I KNEW WHAT WAS EXPECTED WITH MY PROJECTS AND ASSIGNMENTS.						
8. THIS CLASS WAS A GOOD USE OF MY TIME.						
9. I PUT FORTH MY BEST EFFORTS IN THIS CLASS.						
10. PROJECT REFLECTIONS						

HELPED ME EXPRESS WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE PARTICULAR PROJECT.						
11. GRADING WAS FAIR AND CONSISTENT.						
12. I WAS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN MY OWN EDUCATION						
13. THERE WAS A UNIFYING THEME OR CONCEPT THAT TIED ALL THE PROJECTS TOGETHER. (OTHER THAN THE MEDIA OR TECHNIQUE)						
14. I AM PROUD OF WHAT I CREATED IN THIS CLASS.						
15. I PLAN TO CONTINUE TAKING CLASSES IN ART OR PHOTOGRAPHY.						
16. MY TEACHER WAS KNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE COURSE CONTENT.						
17. MY TEACHER'S INSTRUCTION WAS CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE.						
18. I ENJOYED THIS CLASS.						
STATEMENT	AGREE (5)	SOMEWHAT AGREE (4)	SOMETIMES (3)	DISAGREE (2)	STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)	NO OPINION (0)
19. MY TEACHER CHALLENGED ME TO GO BEYOND MY OWN EXPECTATIONS.						
20. MY TEACHER WAS AVAILABLE WHEN NEEDED.						
21. MY TEACHER ENCOURAGED ME TO DO MY BEST						
22. I WOULD TAKE ANOTHER CLASS WITH THIS TEACHER.						
23. I WOULD						

RECOMMEND THIS CLASS TO OTHER STUDENTS						
24. THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT WAS POSITIVE AND CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING.						
25. I HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MYSELF OR MY LIFE GOALS BECAUSE OF THINGS I EXPERIENCED IN THIS CLASS.						
TOTALS						

1. What were your challenges in this class and what did you learn from them?

2. If you could change something about this class what would you change? What suggestions do you have for your instructor that could make this a better class for future students?

3. What was the best and worst thing about your experience in this class?

4. What grade do you think you earned in this class? Please explain your answer.

5. Do you have any other comments, criticisms or suggestions for this class or teacher?

Appendix B

Course Evaluation 2012 - Percentages (%)

Statement	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %			
	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %	AA+H %	3D %	Portfolio %			
1. The content of this course was what you expected.	64	5	57	36	50	0	0	5	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	1	0	
2. My knowledge about art/photography was increased by this course.	45	22	71	18	22	0	27	17	14	9	61	0	0	0	0	5	0	
3. I learned things that I can apply in other subjects.	64	1	29	45	11	29	0	17	14	0	39	14	0	5	14	0	5	0
4. I learned things that I can use in other aspects of my personal life.	64	22	29	36	17	14	0	22	14	0	28	0	0	5	14	0	5	0
5. I could relate to the artists & content presented in this class.	36	1	14	45	17	14	9	11	29	9	44	0	0	0	14	0	5	29
6. I was interested in the topics we covered and the projects we did.	55	17	71	27	28	14	18	39	14	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
7. I knew what was expected with my projects and assignments.	91	28	57	9	50	43	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
8. This class was a good use of my time.	64	28	86	27	17	14	9	61	0	0	0	0	0	44	0	0	11	0

Course Evaluation 2012 - Percentages (%)

	Agree (5)		Somewhat Agree (4)		Sometimes (3)			Disagree (2)		Strongly Disagree (1)		No Opinion (0)		
9. I put forth my best efforts in this class.	64	28	57	9	11	14	18	28	29	0	17	0	0	0
10. Project reflections helped me express what I learned from the particular project.	36	5	29	18	17	14	18	28	43	18	0	0	0	14
11. Grading was fair and consistent.	82	61	86	9	11	14	9	11	0	0	11	0	0	5
12. I was an active participant in my own education	64	44	56	36	17	22	0	28	14	0	0	0	44	0
13. There was a unifying theme or concept that tied all the projects together. (Other than the media or technique)	45	1	29	36	22	29	9	39	43	9	17	0	0	11
14. I am proud of what I created in this class.	55	38	43	36	5	29	18	17	29	0	17	0	0	5
15. I plan to continue taking classes in art or photography.	55	44	77	9	5	0	0	16	0	9	17	0	9	5
16. My teacher was knowledgeable in the course content.	82	56	100	17	11	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	5	0
17. My teacher's instruction was clear and understandable.	55	38	86	45	28	14	0	22	0	0	5	0	0	5
18. I enjoyed this class.	91	17	100	9	22	0	0	44	0	0	0	0	0	5
							Three students did not complete this part of the evaluation							
19. My teacher challenged me to go beyond my own expectations.	63	25	100	25	38	100	13	25	0	0	6	0	0	5
20. My teacher was available when needed.	63	56	50	36	13	50	0	19	0	0	6	0	0	5
21. My teacher encouraged me to do my best	75	25	100	25	25	0	0	13	0	0	6	0	0	31
22. I would take another class with this teacher.	88	25	100	0	25	0	0	38	0	0	0	0	13	13
23. I would recommend this class to other students	75	19	100	25	31	0	0	19	0	0	6	0	0	13
24. The classroom environment was positive and conducive to learning.	63	38	75	36	31	0	13	13	25	###	6	0	0	5
25. I have a better understanding of myself or my life goals because of things I experienced in this class.	38	19	50	25	0	50	13	13	0	25	25	0	0	13

Appendix C

Excerpts From Student Written Project Reflections

3D DESIGN - LAYERS OF ME PROJECT

Reflection:

The
How

I used low relief on my letter t, which has 4 flowers that represent high relief in a way. I used high relief on my S, which I spray painted hot pink with a mist of white. I used a yellow glaz paint on my t, which someone had made a crackle effect that I actually like a lot. I used lilies as my types of flowers I put on my t.



I think ~~the~~ the colors I chose complement each other very well. Although I used quite a few colors, they all complement each other in their own ways. The reason I chose these colors is because I love them all. They all look so good together. It was hard to choose just one. The imagery I chose were wings, tissue paper, oil pastels and swirls. I chose the wings because they represent a long lost friend who's in heaven now. My tissue paper was chosen because I love the look it gave to my project and the way it filled up wanted space.

The
Why

Then I chose the oil pastels, and gave it a ~~the~~ crumple effect, which looked awesome. And the swirls because they added the last touch that was needed to make my project look complete. Yes, in one word, and that was the wings. It made the wings out of chalk transfer paper.

Justification

And yes, I do believe my artwork represents me in all sorts of ways. It shows my colors, my favorite things, and my creativity.

I think my project deserves an A because I used all my resources and creativity to the best of my abilities.

To me I believe my project could go for a A or a B. I worked very hard every class. My artwork didn't exactly turn out the way I had it planned in my head. It almost looks better and it tells more about me. But I do believe I deserve a A or B, because it's my life I wanted to share a little bit of that with you and my class.

In my project for 3-D I used no aspects of myself, family, community, interest, beliefs, or values. because I am a rebel, and when I create a piece of artwork I don't follow the direction I create what I feel at the time. The colors I used in the artwork don't really have any symbolism except that the sun is a bright hot oranges and yellows which creates the feeling of the cool melting blues on the A. The reason I incorporated the imagery I did was to show that some things in life can make me feel like I am melting. The only media I used for this project was acrylic, because I have more experience with the paint and also I like the way it always turns out. You'll never get a bad painting with acrylic. This piece of artwork I feel is pretty successful just because of the time and thought I put into it, I feel it's a creative design that's a little independent. So for a grade I think it could pass as a 95.

These past weeks in art we have been doing a scripture using our initials. I used high and low relief to make the scripture stand out. The colors I used were blue orange and black. The blue represents me; calm, peaceful. The orange represent many of my friends, it also complements the blue. I added black to show from where I came from; Pavatton (orange and black T imagery) I incorporated into my scripture was cermes the frog; to represent my humor. I put in a lot of footbal pictures to represent my love for it. I also put a Indian symbol to represent my native american background. I used all the techniques I was aware of but the glueing of the pictures. It seems sloppy to me. I believe my art work communicates who I am with the meaning of the colors, and the media on the work. I think I should get a 87B on the scripture because it might not be the best, but I feel I did it to the best of my ability.

Final reflection

Appendix D

Advanced Art Student Project Written Reflection And Self Assessment

Window into My World Self-Assessment

When creating this *Window into My World*, I included many of my personal characteristics and interests. The light colors represent my happiness and joy, along with the slight dark colors represent regrets in my past as well as sad moments. Christianity is an important aspect of my life, and I demonstrated this by painting wings with white acrylic paint on the two top panels of the window. The background of my project portrays how my personality is full of color. The trunk of a tree created with a collage of pictures throughout my life of friends, family, and some of me expressing different moods. This represents the base and support of my world and success. Without these people or the ability to adjust personalities, I would not be the person I am today. The branches of a tree are formed from the base, serving as extra pieces not able to survive without the support. This represents the relationship between the pictures of my tree and the branches made out of words. The words are additional to my life that would not be possible without the people and events included in the pictures. This artwork is very successful in my opinion because it includes most of the important aspect of my past and present.

Symbols are used throughout this window portraying my interests and beliefs.

1. Quality of composition: 3
2. Use of more than 3 different media: 5
3. Alteration of original window surface: 2
4. “Readability” of the story told: 4
5. Effective visual communication of personal identity: 4



Appendix E

3D Student Assessment Example

<u>Student and Teacher Letter Relief Sculpture Assessment Sheet</u>																	
Name:	Mariah																
<p>Both the student and teacher will use this form to evaluate the success of the completed artwork. Each student must fill out and turn this paper in along with their written self evaluation at the completion of their artwork.</p> <p>Refer to the grading rubric explanations when you are rating your artwork for each category.</p>																	
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 5px;">Category</th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 5px;">Excellent (5) Good (4) Satisfactory (3) Needs Improvement (1-2) Unacceptable (0)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Structure</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Surface Design</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Visual Communication</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Use of the Elements and Principles of Art</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">4 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Craftsmanship</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Total: (add up the scores from the 5 categories)</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">24</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Multiply the total by 4 to get your final project number grade. A (100-93) B (92-85) C (84-77) D (76-69) F (68 and below)</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">96 100 100</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Excellent (5) Good (4) Satisfactory (3) Needs Improvement (1-2) Unacceptable (0)	Structure	5	Surface Design	5	Visual Communication	5	Use of the Elements and Principles of Art	4 5	Craftsmanship	5	Total: (add up the scores from the 5 categories)	24	Multiply the total by 4 to get your final project number grade. A (100-93) B (92-85) C (84-77) D (76-69) F (68 and below)	96 100 100	<p>When you finish your artwork you are to write a self reflection that should be turned in with your art and self assessment sheet. In your reflection you should write in paragraph form with complete sentences to answer the following question.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How have you used low and high relief to illustrate aspects of yourself, family, community, interests, beliefs and values? 2. How have you used color symbolically? What is the meaning of the colors you chose to use? 3. Why did you incorporate the imagery you did? 4. Did you utilize the media and techniques presented in the demonstrations? If you did not why did you choose not to use them? 5. Do you think your artwork successfully communicates who you are, where you come from, what's important to you and what interests you have? 6. What grade do you think you have earned and why? <p><i>Excellent Work!</i></p> <p><i>Great job going beyond the requirements and on to creating something very unique and personal</i></p>
Category	Excellent (5) Good (4) Satisfactory (3) Needs Improvement (1-2) Unacceptable (0)																
Structure	5																
Surface Design	5																
Visual Communication	5																
Use of the Elements and Principles of Art	4 5																
Craftsmanship	5																
Total: (add up the scores from the 5 categories)	24																
Multiply the total by 4 to get your final project number grade. A (100-93) B (92-85) C (84-77) D (76-69) F (68 and below)	96 100 100																

Appendix F

Dear Mrs. Wirt,

Before I graduated I wanted to take the time to thank you for being my teacher and friend these past few years. I know you've been annoyed with me at times (past/missed due dates), but thank you for always helping and believing in me. I've had a lot of teachers over the years, but I can confidently say that I've learned the most from you (and not just because I had you 3 years in a row). You've taught me about art, history, and I've even become a better writer. Aside from teaching me about art, you also gave me a new perspective for the world around me. You've taught me the importance of knowing what I believe in and standing by it against the world. You've taught me that what is right isn't always popular and every effort makes a difference. I want you to know that as a teacher you plant seeds too, and that you have impacted my education and life in such a great, positive way, and these lessons are things I will always carry with me.

Thank you again,
always your student,
Lauren

Appendix G

(IRB-02 FORMS IF YOU HAVE HUMAN SUBJECTS INCLUDING INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS)

<p>THIS FORM MUST BE TYPED. SEND THIS FORM AND THE SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS TO IRB02, PO BOX 112250, GAINESVILLE, FL 32611. SHOULD YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPLETING THIS FORM, CALL 352-392-0433.</p>			
TITLE OF PROTOCOL:	CONTEMPORARY THEMES IN HIGH SCHOOL ART		
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	STEPHANIE WIRT		UFID #:8944-6908
DEGREE / TITLE:	MASTERS OF ART EDUCATION	MAILING ADDRESS: 2582 NORWOOD CREEK WAY POWHATAN, VA 23139	EMAIL: SWIRT@UFL.EDU
DEPARTMENT:	FINE ART		TELEPHONE #: (804)839-7375
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):	N/A	UFID#:	EMAIL:
SUPERVISOR (IF PI IS STUDENT):	DR. ELIZABETH DELACRUZ	UFID#:	
DEGREE / TITLE:	MASTER OF ARTS IN ART EDUCATION	MAILING ADDRESS COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OFFICE OF THE DEAN 101 FINE ARTS BUILDING A PO BOX 115800 GAINESVILLE FL 32611-5800	EMAIL : PKLEPACKI@ARTS.UFL.EDU
DEPARTMENT:	SCHOOL OF ART AND ART HISTORY		TELEPHONE #: (352) 392-0207
DATE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH:	MARCH 2012 - AUGUST 2012		
SOURCE OF FUNDING (A COPY OF THE GRANT PROPOSAL MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH THIS PROTOCOL IF FUNDING IS INVOLVED):	N/A		

SCIENTIFIC PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this study is gain an understanding of how teachers engage contemporary themes and resources in high school art education, as well as to gain understanding of how students' creative process is guided by the instructional resources used by art teachers. It is to also understand what current high school art students view as relevant contemporary themes for studying and creating art in the 21st century and how those themes relate to the artwork they actually create.

**DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN NON-TECHNICAL LANGUAGE:
(EXPLAIN WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH OR TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT.)**

This research will take place in my Advanced Art class at Powhatan High School in Powhatan, Virginia. Student participants in this class will be the subjects of my research. This class consists of 14 students ranging in age from 15-19. I will observe students in their art making processes as they relate to the thematic instruction provided by me as the teacher and research.. My observations will be documented in a field journal and with photographs of student art work. I will also conduct a survey with my students in which I will ask them questions about their engagement with my thematic curriculum. Student participants will also submit written reflections about their artwork and I will analyze their written statements. \

DESCRIBE POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

There are no risks to students in this study. No names or images of student face will be used. The student may drop out at any time. Both students and parents will sign consent forms. All school and district policies regarding use of student information will be followed. All names associated with data collection will be held in complete confidence. This data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office at home. I will keep this data for approximately 3 years. After that time the data will be destroyed.

DESCRIBE POTENTIAL RISKS: There are no risks and students can drop out at any time.

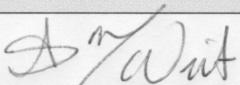
DESCRIBE HOW PARTICIPANT(S) WILL BE RECRUITED:

Student participants will come from the classes I teach at Powhatan High School in Powhatan, Virginia. I will ask for student volunteers from my Advanced Art class.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (TO BE APPROACHED WITH CONSENT)	20	AGE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS:	14-19	AMOUNT OF COMPENSATION/ COURSE CREDIT:	N/A
--	----	----------------------------	-------	--	-----

DESCRIBE THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS. (ATTACH A COPY OF THE INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT. SEE <HTTP://IRB.UFL.EDU/IRB02/SAMPLES.HTML> FOR EXAMPLES OF CONSENT.)

Prior to conducting this study I will send letters to the parents and students asking for their consent and assent. I will keep these letters on file.

(SIGNATURE SECTION)		
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S) SIGNATURE:		DATE: 3/9/20 12
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S) SIGNATURE(S):		DATE:
SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE (IF PI IS A STUDENT):		DATE:
DEPARTMENT CHAIR SIGNATURE:		DATE:

Appendix H

Principal's Permission For Study

Stephanie,

I approve of your thesis area of study. My understanding is that you will focus on your classroom practice and assessment of student knowledge and construction as it relates to the curriculum and instruction of the PCPS advanced art curriculum.

Please share documentation with me, especially as it relates to the assessment portion of the research.

Thank you.

Kris Gwaltney, Principal
Powhatan High School
(804) 598-5710 ext. 301
Fax: (804) 598-0298

From: "stephanie wirt" <stephanie.wirt@powhatan.k12.va.us>
To: "kris gwaltney" <kris.gwaltney@powhatan.k12.va.us>
Sent: monday, march 12, 2012 8:48:36 am
Subject: IRB administrator approval
Good morning Mrs. Gwaltney,

As you know I am a graduate student in art education with the University of Florida. I am in my thesis term now and conducting action research as part of my capstone project. I am studying my own classroom practice and student knowledge construction. My primary focus is on curriculum and student involvement and my setting is Powhatan High School with a specific focus on the design, implementation and assessment of my advanced art curriculum. As part of my institutional review board (IRB) application I need proof of school administrator's approval of my research. I have been, and will continue to follow all county policies regarding student images and names. (No names of students will appear in my final research documentation.) What I need at this point is an email from you as my school principal to me stating that you are aware of my research and approve of me studying my teaching practice and student interaction and involvement with the curriculum and knowledge construction process. Would you please send me an email (reply to this is fine) that states I have your permission and approval?

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Stephanie Wirt

Fine Arts Department Chair
Art/Photography Instructor
Powhatan High School
1800 Judes Ferry Road
Powhatan, VA 23139
(804) 598-5710

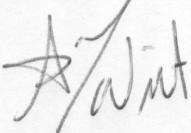
Appendix I

Parental Consent For Student Participation Form

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

This year I will be completing my master's degree in Art Education from the University of Florida. As part of my degree program I will be documenting my classroom instruction through photographs, student surveys and observations of student engagement in the classroom. I will be posting units of instruction and examples of student art work on my non PCPS professional web site. That site is www.wirtartalk.weebly.com. No images of the children will be used, nor will children's names be revealed in any of my research. Your child's participation is completely voluntary. Your child's participation and or withdraw will not in any way effect their grade or standing in my class. You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks to the participants in this study. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 1112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (532) 392-0433.

Thank you,



STEPHANIE WIRT
Art Department Chair
Art and Photography Instructor
Powhatan High School
Powhatan, VA. 23139
(804) 598-5710 EXT 130
Stephanie.wirt@pcpsk12.com

Parental Consent Form for Research Study

I consent to having my child participate as a subject in Stephanie Wirt's study as articulated above.

I will allow images of my child's art work to appear in publishable documents relating to Stephanie Wirt's graduate studies in art education with the University of Florida.

Student Name: _____ Parent's Name: _____
Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

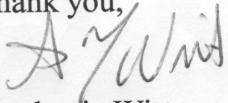
Appendix J

Student Assent For Study Form

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

This year I will be completing my master's degree in art education from the University of Florida. As part of my degree program I will be documenting my classroom instruction through photographs, student surveys and observations of student engagement in the classroom. I will be posting units of instruction and examples of student art work on my non PCPS professional web site. That site is www.wirtartalk.weebly.com. No images of you will be used nor will your name be revealed in any of my research. Your identity will not be reveled in my research reports. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time without consequence. There are no known risks to the participants in this study. Questions or concerns about your rights as research participant may be directed to the irb02 office, university of Florida, box 1112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (532) 392-0433.

Thank you,



Stephanie Wirt
Art department chair
Art and photography instructor
Powhatan high school
Powhatan, VA 23139
(804) 598-5710 ext. 130
Stephanie.wirt@pcpsk12.com

Student Assent for Research Study

I choose to participate in this research study. I understand that my name or image of me will be used in this Stephanie Wirt's research study.

I allow images of my artwork to appear in publishable documents relating to Stephanie Wirt's research.

Student Name: _____
Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



Stephanie Wirt graduated from Longwood University in 1997 with a Bachelors of Fine Arts and a K-12 Art Teacher Certification. After designing the Art program at the Blandford School within the Beaumont Juvenile Prison and teaching there for over a year, she made the move to public school education. Stephanie has been teaching art at Powhatan High School in Powhatan, Virginia for the last 14 years. After 12 years of teaching high school Stephanie wanted to revive her teaching practice. In August of 2012 she will graduate from the University of Florida with a Masters in Art Education. Stephanie teaches a wide variety of art and photography classes and co-sponsors the National Art Honor Society at Powhatan High School.

Stephanie's current research deals with issues of personal and global identity, the use of emerging digital technologies in art instruction and student learning and thematic curriculum design.