

INCORPORATING CONTEMPORARY ART INTO A MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

By

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE
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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
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Abstract

For my Capstone Project, I researched how to incorporate contemporary art into my middle school curriculum. My goals for this investigation were to determine the best ways to incorporate contemporary art into my current curriculum and why it is important to teach contemporary art to middle school students. Six of my middle school students participated in a thematically based curriculum project that involved learning about contemporary artists that use recycled and non-traditional art materials in their work. Following the inspiration of the contemporary artists, students created their own personal artwork using recycled and non-traditional art materials. At the end of the project, the six students participated in an online classroom blogging site after their art project was complete. The classroom blog site and my personal blog site where I documented each class day activity can be found at

<http://nkirkpatrick.edublogs.org> and <http://dmsart.tumblr.com> as well as my personal website, <http://www.nicolejpottery.com>.

Through this action research project, I found that my approach to teaching moved from a didactic role in the classroom to a guide or facilitator who used an inquiry-based approach to learning with my students. Through the use of nontraditional materials, my students gained knowledge in using many new tools in constructing their artwork. By incorporating contemporary art into my current eighth grade curriculum, I was able to determine areas where I could continue to add contemporary themes and units into my other sixth and seventh grade classes I currently teach.

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In this Capstone Project, I chose to investigate how I can effectively incorporate contemporary art into my daily eighth grade curriculum. Through courses I took in the University of Florida's online graduate art education program, I was introduced to many new contemporary ideas, artists and literature. I learned about visual culture and contemporary art, and how each affects our lives today. During my early graduate studies at the University of Florida, I started to question my own teaching methods and practices. Reading current literature about Olivia Gude's *Spiral Workshop*, sparked my interest in contemporary art and artists (2000). I began to consider how and why I might incorporate contemporary art into my middle school curriculum. I felt that contemporary art could positively affect my own students' lives and thinking if introduced into my current curriculum, but I wasn't sure how to proceed.

Statement of the Problem

Olivia Gude observes that many art teachers today often teach art the way they were taught in school (2000). According to Gude, "typical art courses today include the teaching of observational and perspective drawing (modeled on academic practices), teaching color theory and principles of design (based on modernist curriculum), and teaching crafts and media (based on various traditional forms)" (2007, p. 11). It seems to me that art teachers today may be falling behind in teaching contemporary art thinking and practice. Based on my personal interactions with other art educators, I've seen little to no contemporary art implemented into middle school classrooms. Many teachers today still teach the disciplined-based art education (DBAE) model as their set curriculum but these teachers may have not kept up with current practices in the four disciplines identified in the DBAE model, practices which were supposed to inform art education. As an artist/art educator, I have always taught my students the way I was taught in

high school, using a DBAE approach. But I have not had a chance to study and create ways to include contemporary art in my curriculum.

Looking for good examples of contemporary art practices and resources for teaching, I have found the website *art 21* (<http://www.art21.org/teach/on-contemporary-art>) useful. This site encourages art educators to teach around themes and big ideas. Using themes and big ideas to plan art curricula is something new to me, and something I hope to better understand.

Purpose and Goals of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop a way to teach about contemporary art. I believe that contemporary art offers opportunities for my middle school students to find personal meaning and value in art making. My goal is to create an art curriculum that connects my middle school classroom to the current world outside to my middle school classroom. By expanding my teaching to include contemporary art and artists, I want my students to consider current ideas and to develop a sense of meaning through exploration and investigation. I want to build upon my current teaching methods of DBAE by deepening my knowledge of contemporary art in a classroom setting. Through my research, I hope that my students will be able to learn about contemporary art and artists. They will also learn how to use a classroom blog site where each can share their findings.

Research Questions

This proposed study focused on four questions I felt I needed to answer in order to effectively incorporate contemporary art in my classroom: (1) What is contemporary art? (2) How does it affect students' lives today? (3) Why is it important to teach? and (4) How can it be taught effectively in a middle school classroom?

In order to conduct this study, I first needed to understand what my students knew about contemporary art. I also had to consider how contemporary art might affect my students' lives today. I tried to make connections to what students thought was important and then attempted to change the way they think about art. I searched to find solutions to why it is important to teach contemporary art instead of relying on older or more traditional art projects inspired by long-departed artists. Most importantly, I sought to discover how I could teach contemporary art in a manner that was meaningful to my middle school students now and in the future.

Significance of the Study

My findings indicate that incorporating contemporary art into my middle school curriculum enabled my students to learn about current trends and issues in their community as well as around the globe. The importance of such learning seems self-evident. Additionally, introducing contemporary themes and issues into my art classroom allowed my students to use their critical and creative thinking skills in developing new ideas and determining how to articulate those ideas into meaningful artworks using new materials and tools. This study also highlighted the importance of fostering creative exploration about the world and the issues that affect my students' lives. By incorporating contemporary art into my curriculum, I was able to build a foundation of skills that will enable my students to continue to research larger ideas that are personal to their studies down the road. By including open-ended questions into my current teaching, students were able to learn to formulate more than one solution to their art. In other words, my students were able to answer the questions I posed to them by developing more than one outcome to their artwork. Although these outcomes are also possible in art programs that do not incorporate contemporary art, I believe that including contemporary art practices greatly

facilitated this kind of thinking. This became most evident when my students were able to research contemporary artists and see the work artists are creating today.

Assumptions

When including contemporary art into my classroom curriculum, I assumed most of my students did not know what “contemporary art” meant. Having had the same students from 6th and 7th grade, I knew exactly what information had been taught to them previously. After quizzing my students on their background knowledge about contemporary art, my assumption was correct, they had no idea what “contemporary art” meant or what it looked like.

Contemporary art was a new term for my students to hear and learn about.

Looking back at the methods and practices of my teaching, it is not clear to me that I had not adequately allowed my students to develop their personal ideas and artwork independently. I had assumed all along that students were creating their art based on personal memories or experiences. However, through this Capstone Research Project, I found I was teaching my students to create their artwork based on what *I* wanted their artwork to reflect. For example, I wasn’t allowing my students the opportunities to expand on their ideas regardless of the knowledge of art skills they possessed. It was difficult for me to accept a variety of end results in their art when directed by my instructional prompts. My mind was closed to thinking there was more than one idea my students were capable of developing when I was instructing them in class. Through this research, I found that my prior assumptions about teaching were wrong. My students were all capable of independently developing many new ideas of their own in their art making, and choosing their own ideas as inspiration for their final artworks.

Definition of Terms

Contemporary Art. Contemporary art is a range of art objects and practices in different styles and media dating from the recent past to the present. It differs from modern art in that the term “Contemporary art” does not carry the implication of a non-traditional style, but instead refers only to the time period in which the work was created (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000). Modern and Contemporary are sometimes fluid terms, used interchangeably. The term Contemporary is sometimes more narrowly used to refer to art from ca. 1960 or 1970 up to the present or to refer to the current time period without reference to a style of art (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000).

Modern Art. The term “modern” generally refers to painting, sculpture, graphic arts, and architecture dating from the late 19th century to the present, which is characterized by a rejection of traditional artistic forms and conventions. It typically reflects changing social, economic, and intellectual conditions (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000). Modern art includes numerous 20th century movements and theories. It differs from contemporary art, which does not carry the implication of a non-traditional style, but instead refers only to the time period in which the work was created (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000). The term Modernism sometimes more narrowly refers to art made from the early 1900s until the 1960s or 1970s (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000).

Postmodern. The term postmodern refers to the style and period of art and architecture that developed in the 1960s and after, when there was a clear challenge to the dominance of Modernism (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000).

Aesthetics. The term aesthetics refers to a branch of Western philosophy concerned primarily with the fine arts, although it may also be used in the context of the appreciation of natural beauty (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000). Usage of the term dates from the 18th century, although historical discussions regarding issues now called aesthetics date from Antiquity (The J. Paul Getty Trust online dictionary, 2000). Aesthetics also refers generally to theories of art or the experience of art and other natural forms.

Constructivist. In the context of this paper, constructivist refers to the teaching philosophy based on the concept students construct their own understanding by reflecting on their personal experiences, and by relating the new knowledge with what they already know (Business Dictionary online, 2012). Each student creates his or her own mental-models to make sense of the world (Business Dictionary online, 2012). One of its main principles is that learning is search for meaning, therefore, to be effective, a teacher must help the student in discovering his or her own meaning. Although based on cognitive psychology research, its history goes back to the ancient Greece, the Socratic method (Business Dictionary online, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

My findings are limited by time. In my first project, my students were unable to finish their first project within the 5 to 6 days I had planned to continue the unit of study. Due to the scheduled time with my students, which was every day at the same time for 40 minutes, they needed 10-11 days to complete their first project. Extended class time had to be allowed for my students to finish their projects. I had not anticipated working on such a project for more than 2 weeks. Because of 25 students and only myself to supervise, it was extremely difficult to have one-on-one conversations with individual students during the process of creating their work.

Also with all 25 students working with multiple materials, at times the classroom was very active with all students working and moving around, which I have not been used to.

During the second project, we had limited use of technology in my classroom. I had to plan ahead to check out a computer cart, but because my class is limited to 40 minutes, time was limited for the activity due to unforeseen issues. I had to extend class time for this project as well. The use of the Internet server at the school would go down and some computers were unable to connect to the Internet. Some computers had glitches, which also slowed the process of my students' blogging their information onto their classroom blog site during class time. I have learned through the introduction of contemporary art into my classroom that it takes more time to plan and implement contemporary art projects in class.

Literature Review

Many middle school art educators rework their art curriculum content based on daily actions of their classrooms. Some middle schools provide art textbooks, such as the textbook, *Introducing Art* (Mittler, Ragans, Scannell & Unsworth, 2007), to guide teachers in incorporating traditional art content into the curriculum. This textbook promotes the teaching of discipline-based art education (DBAE). Since the 1980's, the DBAE model has encouraged teachers to construct art curriculum and teach art content through four disciplines: art history, art criticism, art making and aesthetics (Stewart & Walker, 2005). More recently, art education scholars such as Gude (2000) and Woywod (2004) have called on practicing art teachers to center their curriculums on contemporary art and artistic practices. Given this new direction, questions remain on how teachers might come to decide what contemporary art content should be included in their art curriculums.

My investigation of how contemporary art best fits into a middle school art curriculum involved reviewing professional literature related to the following questions: What type (if any) of specific curricular approach is used in middle school art classes currently? If there is not a specific contemporary art curriculum, how can contemporary art be incorporated and taught effectively in a middle school classroom? If contemporary art is incorporated into the classroom, how does it relate to the lives of the students? What do national and state standards in art say about the content of art taught by middle school art teachers, and what methodology and pedagogy is recommended for teaching contemporary art in a middle school art classroom? Within this literature review, I will explore the findings and suggestions in the literature related to each of these areas and then conclude with considerations for further study.

Current Art Curriculum Models in Middle Schools

Teachers today often teach art the way they were taught in school. Such traditional teaching methods usually stress developing students' knowledge of art history, and the elements and principles of art and design, with some attention to technical skills (Gude, 2000). Since the introduction of DBAE in the 1980s, research demonstrates that preK-12 students today typically attend art class with curriculum attempting to increase their knowledge of the elements and principles of art and design (Anderson, 2004; Bain, Kuster, Milbrandt & Newton, 2010; Darts, 2006; Gude, 2000; Gude, 2007; Packard, 1984; Popovich, 2006; Woywod, 2004). In order to satisfy the public school bureaucracy, DBAE pacifies school administrators by evaluating and analyzing for results within the art classroom (Moore, 1991; Packard, 1984). This type of structure has allowed art teachers to follow current assessment expectations of their school's administration. DBAE stressed formal, prescribed, sequential, and systematically assessed art programming. This was both its strength, and possibly one of it's weaknesses insofar as DBAE

oriented art teachers may have relied on overly formalistic approaches to teaching, and insofar as art teachers were not well versed in understanding contemporary art practices.

Changes in approaches to art curriculum design have taken place throughout the past two decades from a traditional or formalist model of art to a more post-modern and contemporary approach. More art teachers today are looking to include less rigidly constructed programs, utilizing contemporary art approaches by introducing contemporary artists and visual culture to their classrooms. Gude observes that curriculum that stresses art history, visual elements and principles; and color wheel, technical skills, and other aspects of art production are already over half a century old (Gude, 2000). Others observe that the goal in a contemporary art curriculum is to engage students with current culture, not to re-create particular artists' work (Mayer 2008).

Textbooks now include "historical and cultural information about artworks and prompts for students and teachers to interpret meanings found in artworks produced by others," which DBAE stresses (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 11). Art educators today are adjusting their teaching to include critical viewing of art and the students' responses to visual culture. Historically, it was important to show students' developmental stages and learning styles students experienced in the arts through a DBAE approach. Building on this view, Stewart and Walker (2005) explain how the use of enduring ideas and essential questions, also known as the *backward design* (Wiggins & McTighe 1998), is foundational for curriculum planning in art education today. Using *backward design*, art educators are able to assist students with the development of their ideas in response to the flood of visual images students encounter daily through visual culture.

Time constraints in the classroom and little time for planning, is a critical issue art teachers face on a daily basis. In identifying problems teachers face today, Bain et al, (2010)

observe that, “One of the most common problems in developing curriculum was the lack of time” (p. 240). Deasy (2003) gives suggestions for what school administrators can do to help with the overall collaboration between teachers to affectively reinforce instruction in the art classroom:

Allowing core teachers and art teachers opportunities to collaborate through various lessons, students will gain general and specific skills that enhance their learning in school. Joint planning enables quality interdisciplinary lessons, which enforces comprehension and understanding that will be useful to each student. (p. 17)

Although art teachers may have more resources available to them today, the lack of time prevents teachers from engaging in the preparation needed for effective curriculum development for the classroom.

Learning Standards in Art Education

New state standards, also known as the essential and common core standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012), adopted by 45 states across the US, promote the idea of integrating subjects as a way to conceptualize academic curriculum. By the use of mandatory tests, student achievement is expected to show common knowledge in which all students have the ability to be successful in life after high school. Common Core standards help students set goals with a high-level education.

Additionally, “issues-based art education” has become a current form of integrating social, political and cultural issues that explore the process of making art (Anderson, 2004; Duncum, 1997; Knight, 2006; Marshall, 2005; Popovich, 2006). Using the term “issues-based art education” art educators can easily remember that instruction should center on real world

issues. Some examples of real world issues include multiculturalism, personal identity, freedom, heroes, community (social structures), visual culture and the environment (Gude, 2007; Knight, 2006; Popovich, 2006).

Mayer (2008) observes, “if art teachers start with building their own knowledge of contemporary art and ideas, rather than with standards, they will produce a curriculum that is accountable to state and national standards” (p. 79). Although standards in education are important, research suggests implementing meaningful experiences into the curriculum as the highest form of learning achievable (Anderson, 2004; Bain et al, 2010; Darts, 2006; Gude, 2000; Gude, 2007; Packard, 1984; Popovich, 2006; Woywod, 2004). With the right knowledge, goals and planning, the arts can be the most powerful and meaningful learning experience students have in a classroom. Art standards require lessons to focus on meaning and examine art images as meaning-makers and mediums for communications (Marshall, 2006). By including the ideals of DBAE, art teachers are within the so-called frameworks of national and state standards. State standards differ among each other but have the underlying theme that art education promotes formal qualities of art in which they explore and convey ideas (Marshall, 2006). In other words, a DBAE orientation or formalized standards in art education do not preclude art teachers from including contemporary practices; rather limitations of time for research and planning are limiting factors.

Pedagogy in Contemporary Art Curriculum

Some research suggests providing students with stimulated learning opportunities where a safe and dynamic space embraces active and engaged learning. Wilson (2008) calls this type of space where “new forms of visual cultural production and meaning are encouraged,” as third-site visual cultural pedagogy (p. 8). Other research provides examples of similar learning

environments such as Gude's *Spiral Workshop* (2000). Gude's (2000) *Spiral Workshop* middle and high school students are encouraged to "disrupt traditional means of thinking about culture and art" and that it is a "postmodern approach to curriculum construction" where curriculum is new in content (pp. 77-78). Struggling to make the transition to this type of curriculum and pedagogy, Woywod (2004) posed questions such as, "How do I make this work in my classroom?" and "So what do I teach?" (pp. 5-6). The inclusion of media techniques and technical skills were among key factors when implementing contemporary art into an art curriculum. Several authors, such as Gude and Woywod agreed skills needed to express personal thoughts and views as an important component, however the mastery of skills and techniques should not override the focus of the meaning in the work itself (Darts, 2006; Gude, 2000; Marshall, 2005; Woywod, 2004).

Another pedagogical shift teachers must make when including contemporary art in an art curriculum is a focus of big ideas and learning objectives. Stewart & Walker (2005) explain that such ideas link academic subject matter with life-focused issues. The conceptual development of an idea in a given lesson makes for participants that are more active and in-depth understanding that promotes mastery of knowledge and skills needed for today's society. Gude (2007) suggests "art curricular approaches should investigate big questions about the uses of art and other images in shaping our interactions with the world around us" (pp. 6-7). Marshall (2005) suggests art teachers "see themselves as 'spinners' who pose questions that challenge students to take things further, follow ideas, and mine their implications" (p. 240). A pedagogy for teaching contemporary art shifts the role of the teacher from a master who lectures and delivers the content to the students, to giving students a more active role in his or her own learning. This view is confirmed by Erickson & Villeneuve (2008), who suggest that the incorporation of

contemporary art in an art curriculum requires teachers to provide students with opportunities to gain knowledge through investigating through their art making.

When teachers center their curriculum on items from students' visual culture, students are able to connect the visual world to their identities. Gude (2007) explains "visual culture concepts can help teachers to structure contemporary aesthetic investigations of the stuff of our everyday lives" (p. 13). Visual culture deals with the images from mass media, television, movies, music videos, computer and advertisements in magazines and newspapers. Students in the 21st century live with a flood of images that stem from visual culture in which students identify and value. Art educators need to use visual culture to reach students in producing meaningful works of art. When implementing the use of visual culture studies into an art curriculum, art educators are allowing students to discover and develop their own voices. Again, this connection between meaningful art and developing ideas with contemporary art allow for success in learning.

Conclusion

Art educators today face serious budget cuts along with time constraints that put pressure on adequate planning for classroom instruction. Meanwhile, art educators are slowly recognizing the transformative power contemporary art has on the lives of students. Although the research gives ample suggestions for how to incorporate contemporary art into a curriculum, the bulk of the work is up to each individual teacher. There are no set guidelines in place that state the exact way of implementing contemporary art into a middle school curriculum. Stewart and Walker (2005) prompt art educators to look to the current curriculum and rethink meaningful instruction. Each state, local and district school system has various reasons or methods for the curriculum used in classrooms. The research reviewed here demonstrates the need for a careful

study of a teacher's current curriculum and the need to reflect on where and how changes can occur.

Each author has various points he or she deemed important when attempting to include contemporary art in an art curriculum. As an art educator, choosing the right methods or strategies to fit into a current classroom will take extensive time and planning. Researching these three areas related to contemporary art in a middle school curriculum led me to believe there is no specified textbook developed for middle school classroom that takes on this task. All the research suggests various ideas that art educators have created for themselves when planning to include contemporary art into their curriculums. Creating contemporary art curriculum can become difficult when art educators face local school administrators and policy makers. Yes, resources and strategies art educators can use to gain knowledge in contemporary art include local museums, art galleries, subscribing to magazines, encyclopedic sites online, art websites, and community art programs (Mayer, 2008). To gain more insight, research leads me to investigate further studies on how to develop a middle school contemporary art curriculum.

In summary, to incorporate contemporary art into a middle school classroom, I need to take a closer look at my current art curriculum, how the curriculum aligns with state and local standards and what the best pedagogical research I can use in my classroom. By researching these areas, I can evaluate my teaching methods and instruction, which will then enable me to incorporate contemporary art into my middle school curriculum.

Methodology

I used Participatory Action Research methods for my study. As I researched contemporary artists, I noticed that artist today use multiple materials and engaged current life experiences and issues in their artwork. I decided to develop a unit of study based around these

ideas, which I felt my students would be able to connect to. I also opened up my expectations and allowed more free exploration and decision making in my students. The student art making became about the ideas and creative processes, rather than a predictable prescribed outcome. I observed my students working through two different art activities where they created art works that communicate contemporary themes in their artwork. Some teaching methods and strategies I implemented were: (1) project-based learning where I guided and advised rather than dictated the project outcome; (2) the use of different art assessments such as formative and self-evaluations; (3) thematic teaching where students focused on an inquiry-based investigation rather than a technique-driven lesson or one in which they mimic or copy other artworks or illustrations; and (4) individual and cooperative work.

Using the *backward design* model, I created a unit of art, titled “*Seeing Art in Different Ways*,” in which my students viewed contemporary artists using a wide variety of materials to communicate their ideas. The essential questions my students explored were: “What materials do contemporary artists use in creating art?” “Why do contemporary artists choose to use recycled materials and what are they trying to say?” and “What skills do contemporary artists need to create personal artworks?” Teaching toward an understanding that contemporary art uses a wide variety of materials, I was able to observe my students engaged in a manner I have not seen before. By incorporating this unit of study in my classroom curriculum, I was able to reiterate and build upon learning experiences by questioning their ideas throughout the lessons.

My intent in this study was to observe and describe ways in which some of the contemporary approaches described above can fit into my middle school curriculum. Bullock and Galbraith (1992) state, “How art teachers actually think about and confront changes in relation to themselves and the needs of their students continues to be critical to art education

curriculum development within the realities of schools" (p. 86). During the process of implementing my project, my focus shifted from attempting to answer my research questions to following my student's lead and exploring their questions. As a result of this study, I provided descriptions of what art teaching looked like within my middle school classroom when contemporary art was included into the curriculum. Furthermore, I described how the development of my lessons, using themes and the *backward design* model were integrated within the structure of my (now) student-centered art curriculum.

Subjects

Participants in the project were from a largely middle-class community and multi-diverse group of students. The site of this research was a middle school in a rural area of the Southeast United States that is surrounded by farmland, and is where I currently teach art. Approximately 400 sixth through eighth grade students attend the school. The middle school reflects the community's economic and ethnic diversity. Approximately 87% of the students receive free or reduced-priced lunch and breakfast. The community, in which this school is housed has a population of over 9,000, is 54.56% White, 41.21% African-American and 2.24% Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2008). I conducted my research looking primarily at the work of six students: Zachary (8th grade White-Caucasian male), Katie (8th grade White-Caucasian female), Rene (8th grade White-Caucasian female), Slim (8th grade African-American male), Jack (8th grade Indonesian male), and Melissa (8th grade White-Caucasian female). All participants have pseudo-names to protect their confidentiality.

Research Site

My research was conducted in the fall semester, between September and November 2012, with one of my eighth grade classes. I chose one of my two eighth grade classes based on class

size. I chose my morning eighth grade class because it is a smaller class and the majority of my students had art with me in 6th and 7th grade. Many of the students in my afternoon eighth grade class had never taken art before. I thought it best to choose participants who had art with me from previous years.

My daily classes are set the same everyday. I teach the same classes with the same students every day for two nine-week periods (or 18 weeks). I teach two classes of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. My morning eighth grade class has 25 students. My research took place in this morning eighth grade class. My research is based on the information I taught in the art classroom where my students learn everyday.

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Through this study, I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of my role as an art educator in a middle school environment. I looked for ways to improve my practice by engaging in action research guided by my questions of interest and using reflective methods of documentation. Some questions of my inquiry involved ideas and experiences about contemporary art that were most worthwhile teaching and learning in a middle school art class. Some examples were specific themes middle school students would find engaging and meaningful, such as using different types of materials to create artworks and using technology as a way to view and create art. I wanted to observe my students engaged in their learning as they worked through creating artwork using recycled materials. I wanted to find the best way to include contemporary art into my classroom, which could help foster ideas further into the semester. The use of journaling, field notes, questionnaires, interviews and photographing student artwork were important data gathered for this study.

In order for me to collect data about how I incorporated contemporary art into my curriculum for this eighth grade class, I used field notes and questionnaires at the start of my research and again at the end of my study. I used questionnaires to gain insight from the beginning of the study when I asked students what they knew about contemporary art. At the end of my study, I gave another questionnaire to document the information gained by implementing contemporary art into my class. I interviewed students to gather feedback about the information they learned. I also compiled the photos, and field notes to a public blog site. The data I collected reflected a contemporary art curriculum where students connected on theme-based art. The data also reflected the shift in my teaching from a didactic approach to a do-it-yourself curriculum. By focusing on teacher-student interactions, I observed behaviors and patterns that helped to formulate opinions regarding the best way to implement contemporary art into my classroom curriculum. My primary goal was the integration of contemporary art into my middle school curriculum and to enhance the overall educational experience of my students within the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

I analyzed my daily activities from my eighth grade class mostly by my reflections each day. I blogged on a Tumblr site (<http://dmsart.tumblr.com>) and was able to get a clearer understanding of the conversations and the overall class experience from that specific day. My journaling has become a very important part of my observations as well as my picture taking throughout each class period. The photographs I collected during each class were a great way for me to go back and observe what my students had accomplished each day. I could evaluate how each day brought my students closer to their finished project.

The conversations I had with my students throughout the class periods have also been a very important part of my analysis. Gathering the opinions of the students who have participated in this study has been key to understanding their ideas about their artwork and their opinion of contemporary art. Each day, at the end of the class period, I was able to speak to each participant. I was able to help those who needed more direction the following day because I asked the six students specific questions about how each believed that day's activities went.

Having had the students previously, I was able to look back through the projects the six students participated in the last two years. Comparing the projects and my students' art making outcome previously, I was able to draw my conclusions based on answers gathered from my students in the interviews and questionnaires. I was able to observe a change or shift in my student's reactions to the unit, whereas in the past I observed semi-engaged students who were just going through the motions.

Limitations

I was limited in this study by the time span of my research. Because of the use of such an individualized project with only 40 minutes each day, my students hardly had time to really get into their artwork. Several students revealed to me that as soon as their ideas started flowing into their artwork, it was time to clean up and move to their next class. Time limitation was a big factor in this research study. I had very limited time when introducing and discussing the project. I wanted to make sure my students had time to develop their ideas by actually working on their projects. I found it extremely difficult to meet with each of my six students when I was responsible for the other 19 students who had to develop their ideas as well (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Setting up classroom blog site



Figure 2: Working on technical issues on blog site

The technical ability my students lacked in working a glue gun, drill, screwdriver, pliers and wire also made it difficult and time consuming considering I had to show and demonstrate those students how to use those tools. This took time away from my observations in class (see Figures 3 and 4).

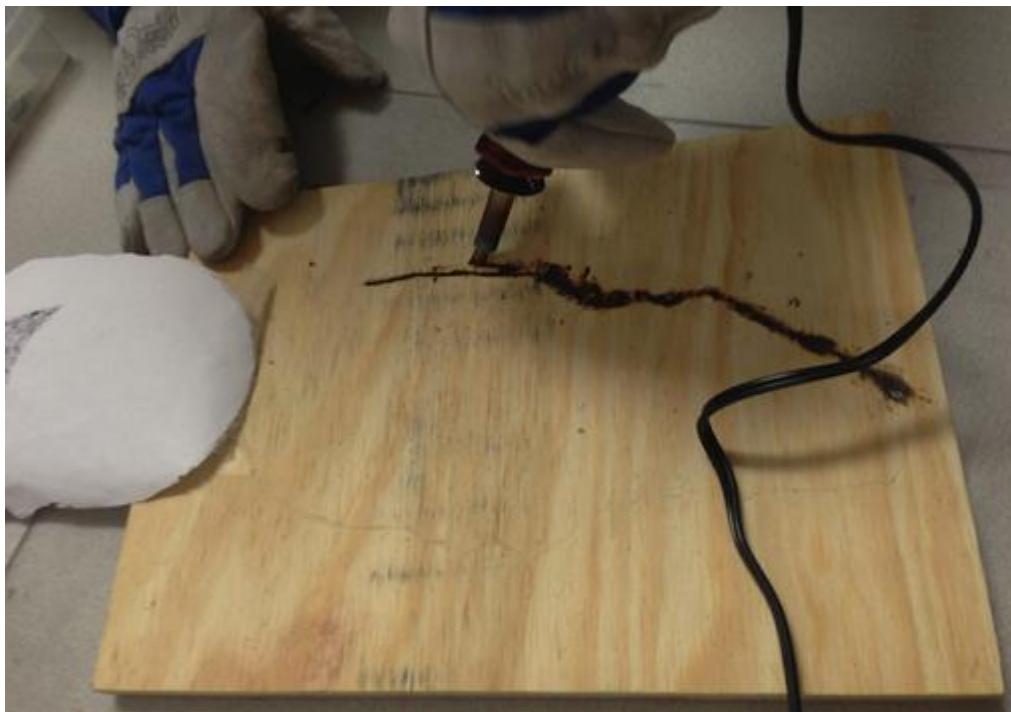


Figure 3: Learning how to use a wood-burning tool



Figure 4: Showing a student how to use a drill

Another hurdle that was difficult to overcome involved the use of computers and the Internet in my class. This was the first classroom experience I had with the computer cart and logging an entire class onto the school server. Although I set up a classroom blog site for my students to blog their ideas about art and activities introduced in class, they did not have enough time each to get online and post to the blog each day because of the 40 minutes allowed for class. Using a computer cart each day, there were certain procedures that must be followed and this took at least ten minutes of class time each day. Such procedures were passing out and assigning

specific laptop computers to each student. Once students received their laptop, logging into it became an issue. Some laptops would start up and some wouldn't. Again, this took time away from getting right into the activity. There were times that our Internet server was down, which caused even more delays. There were some students who had been absent during the days set aside for blogging, which added another frustration trying to allow other class times for their blogging to be completed. Because of the time spent on both these research projects, age of my students and the type of students I teach, I was unable to implement a third project in my unit.

Findings

During my research, I wanted to find answers to these important questions: (1) What is contemporary art? (2) How does it affect students' lives today? (3) Why is it important to teach? and (4) How can it be taught effectively in a middle school classroom? As I journeyed through my study, I discovered my students didn't know what contemporary art is or what it looked like. I found I had to allow time at the beginning of the art activity to explain and discuss contemporary art. Using that time at the beginning of class allowed my students to make connections to our first project; making art using recycled materials.

As students were designing and creating their recycled artwork, I observed them engaged in art making. I questioned my students about the relevance of this activity to their personal lives and four of my six students shared with me that this art project allowed them the choice to create what they feel. Although I had certain criteria for my students to work within, I still allowed each student to expand his or her thinking and work outside my normal didactic instruction. This observation allowed me to see why contemporary art is important to teach in my classroom. By allowing my students the room to explore on their own, I have gained new insight into how my

students want to express themselves artistically. I also found teaching contemporary art effectively takes time.

Although I set out to answer my four research questions, I found that my research shifted once I introduced my unit to the students. Because I was interested and engaged in my students' learning, I followed their lead in questioning many aspects about contemporary art. I found my own personal teaching methods had changed and thus was difficult in finding answers to my original research questions. I discovered my students needed time to explore their ideas with multiple resources such as viewing other artist's work and learning how to use multiple power tools. In the following sections, I describe in more detail how incorporating contemporary art into my existing curriculum has changed my way of teaching.

Finding #1: A Shift in my Teaching

I first interviewed my students to find out any previous knowledge about contemporary art. I used a simple questionnaire and collected their answers. We then proceeded to speak out loud in class about the questions that had been on the questionnaire. What I found was that no one in the class had ever heard of "contemporary art." My students had a difficult time understanding what the word "contemporary" meant. During our discussion, I showed some images of contemporary art by current artists such as Ai Weiwei, Red, Andrew Meyers and Haroshi, which I had found when I was researching contemporary art. During this class period, I only wanted to collect information on what the students knew or didn't know about contemporary art. In fact, as I was showing my students images of these specific artists' work, they started to make connections about a specific theme. They pieced together that all artworks were made from various materials. This was exciting to hear from my students, as there was a

constant flow of questions throughout our discussion. I too had made the same connection when I was learning about contemporary art prior to my Capstone Project.

The next day I started to use more questioning in our discussion. I again showed images I had found on an image-rich social media site called Pinterest (see Figures 5, 6 and 7).



Figure 5: Smashed bottle caps



Figure 6: Recycled plastic bottle art



Figure 7: Recycled CD

Some students had heard about this website but weren't sure about it's purpose. We discussed Pinterest as a means to view pictures about a vast amount of topics. The images we discussed were of specific contemporary artists who use recycled materials or non-traditional art materials in their work. As I reflected on that day's activities, I found that my shift in teaching has moved from an instructor to a guide or facilitator. I found that I too was learning with my students. I too had questions. As I was instructing during the course of our discussions, I realized I was answering their questions with questions as we all became engaged in the topic of recycled and mixed-media art. My students were going as far as gathering ideas for projects and artwork they themselves would love to try, based off of looking at images of contemporary art.

The learning goal for my students was to find out what exactly contemporary art encompasses. The majority of my students believed that contemporary art was the use of any material in a new way, which is happening now in this specific realm of time. Throughout our

discussions, I came to the conclusion that my students did understand one aspect of contemporary art.

Starting our discussions with questions is also a new way of teaching for me. I found once again that my students are more eager to learn and discuss their own personal ideas because I had used extensive questioning. I felt I was asking question after question and allowing my students to come up with their own ideas and answers. I felt my students had a more engaged art learning experience through this new way of teaching than my previous way of delivering an art lesson or discussion.

The first art project was to create an artwork using recycled materials in a way that resonates meaning in their life. Five out of the six participants finished their projects, each with a valued meaning (see Figures 8, 9 and 10).



Figure 8: Melissa cutting outside of softballs



Figure: 9: Katie working on her sculpture



Figure 10: Rachel's recycled CD's

After each class period, I would ask each student how he or she thought the class went as they were constructing their artwork and working out their own ideas. I had positive feedback, and also could hear and reflect on some of the students' struggles in developing their ideas. Some students found out quickly how much more difficult it was to create an artwork using non-traditional art materials but loved how it was going so far (see Figures 11, 12 and 13).



Figure 11: Jack working with wood burner



Figure 12: Katie connecting her cups to form a sculpture



Figure 13: Slim applying gesso

I found through this study that my own approaches to teaching have changed due to the introduction of contemporary art. Teaching as a facilitator has made me a better educator who enables my students to create ideas that may have more than one outcome. This has been a large part of my findings in this research. By teaching with inquiry, I am able to see a positive difference in my student's learning about their own understanding of what they want their personal art to communicate.

Through my research, I was able to reflect back upon my teaching methods and how I introduced each lesson to my class. I found that through implementing my own curriculum, based on a DBAE approach, I was able to include contemporary themes and ideas to my old teaching methods. I realized I didn't have to create a whole new curriculum in order for my students to connect to contemporary art. I found I was successful by introducing my students to current teaching methods and strategies. I was able to include the idea of contemporary art and art making, however, my research truly reflected the positive change in my teaching, rather than how to effectively teach about contemporary art.

Finding #2: Technical Skills are Still Important

Through this study, my students were able to work with non-traditional materials to create artwork. As they worked on their own projects, it came apparent my students never pieced together and constructed objects with their hands before using non-traditional materials. Having had these students in previous years, I was aware of what they had experienced using traditional materials such as tempera, watercolor and acrylic paints, clay, oil and chalk pastels, simple printmaking techniques and the use of markers, crayons, colored pencils and graphite pencils. But, my students had never had a chance to investigate the use of power tools such as a

power drill, screwdrivers, pliers, wire, hot glue guns, wood and a wood-burning tool (see Figures 14 and 15).



Figure 14: Melissa working with a hot glue gun



Figure 15: Rene working with multiple materials

My students were able to come up with ideas and execute their ideas by exploring how those ideas would come together to form their artwork. It was my hope that through this process my students would be able to explore in a new learning environment, one that provokes curiosity by using other materials to communicate ideas in art.

I found that this new learning environment did foster creativity in my students. Using different materials together and becoming acquainted with how new materials worked together also opened up intense dialogue between my students and I as well as with each other. Some of our discussions in class were based on what other artworks my students could create by using a glue gun or by using a drill. My student's revealed to me that by knowing how to use these tools, each would be able to build on those skills to make their next project even better.

Brainstorming on this topic, I started to ask my students further questions such as, "How useful could a textbook be during a project such as this?" All six participants agreed that the hands-on experiences out-weighed any textbook reference. I asked the question, "Even if you didn't have an adult around you to show you how to use any number of power tools, do you think textbooks and reference materials could help you?" Rene, Katie, Slim and Jack answered, "we think that real world experience is still better because it's sometimes difficult to read and understand what any textbook is saying."

Not only did all six of my focus students experience a new tool in constructing their artwork, I saw they all helped each other with their knowledge of using other tools. Each participant helped other students who were struggling with the use of the same tools. This enabled all my students more experience in using other types of materials and tools.

I found that my students became inspired to create more works of art using the topic of recycled and mixed-media materials. On the last day, the class discussion was about what had

been the most important aspect (or part) each had learned throughout the introduction of this unit? All six students were in agreement that the use of new materials and tools were the most beneficial to them. I asked them, “how so, and do you care to elaborate?” Slim replied, “When I was constructing my flag out of wood and rulers, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to use as the stars. When you and I talked about using screws, I had never used a power screwdriver before. I found that my screws went in crooked and it didn’t look as nice as I wanted them to. If I could do it over again, I know my artwork would look a hundred times better because I now know how to use a drill.” Rene replied, “It opened me up to new ways I could create my art now. I never thought to use my CD’s in this way. I definitely never thought I would be able to drill holes in my CD’s without them cracking into a thousand pieces.”

I saw how important it was for my students to have a foundation in learning technical skills in using other mediums and tools. Without their own exploration in using tools to create their art, they would not have the foundation of information to build upon. My students now feel more confident in their ability to construct other types of art. Katie told me that she is now open to repurposing her artworks or using other materials to start recreating her art. All but one student completed his or her finished recycled art piece (see Figures 16, 17 and 18).



Figure 16: Jack's Wood Art



Figure 17: Katie's Light Sculpture



Figure 18: Rene's CD Art

Finding #3: Implementing Contemporary Art Takes Time

Through the introduction of contemporary art into my classroom, I realized it takes time to plan out my units of study. Not knowing exactly what my students would understand about contemporary art and what background information I would have to teach, I found a properly planned out lesson had to be in place. Also, not ever doing projects such as these, I had no prior knowledge of what outcome to expect. I realized, after the fact, planning the entire unit on paper still didn't give me the expected outcome I had anticipated. For example, the time frame for my students to complete their recycled artwork was much longer than I originally anticipated. I had not thought about their unskilled use of power tools as I was planning the unit.

I also found using computers in my art class had positive and negative outcomes. I realized I had to research first the contemporary artist and artwork I wanted my students to see, which took many hours prior to art class. I also had to set up my class blog site and become

accustomed to the site itself. This took many hours to learn how to navigate through the site so I was able to instruct my students on how to create their own blogs in class. Even though I spent countless hours on the blog site, I still struggled through some parts of introducing it into the class. This was one drawback to using computers in my class.

One positive outcome to using computers in my classroom was my students realized how important it is to research and look at other artists and their work. As my students were researching contemporary artists, all six students had asked many questions about their work. The days we worked in class researching contemporary artists, my students wanted to find more contemporary artists whose work they found interesting. By incorporating the use of computers into the classroom environment, this unit opened up many possibilities in learning about art.

Although time was needed to research my unit, I felt I learned as much as my students. Even though I started the discussions in class, my students posed great questions; I felt I could use those ideas as future units in contemporary art.

Summary Across All Findings

Looking back at my findings, the main commonality is the shift in my teaching from a didactic approach to an inquiry and project based-teaching structure using themes and units. I found that teaching with inquiry isn't a new method in education, but for me it was a positive change.

In trying to find the answers to my two main questions: how can I teach my middle school students about contemporary art and why is it important for my students to learn about contemporary art, I realized several key points. First, introducing contemporary art in my middle school classroom needs to be slow and built into my lessons from 6th grade through 8th grade. Second, it is important to teach in middle school because it challenges students to use a wide

variety of art media to help achieve a greater understanding about viewing art and art making. Third, contemporary art actively involves students looking at art in a new way and encourages them to gather ideas in which to explore and investigate art further.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the shift in my current curriculum to teaching art from a contemporary perspective, I was able to challenge and encourage my students to engage and reflect upon their own works of art in new ways. Instead of specifically focusing on the elements and principles of art and design, the use of big ideas and themed-based art provided meaningful opportunities of inquiry in my classroom.

In this Capstone Project, I wanted to find how I could incorporate contemporary art into my current middle school curriculum. I wanted to research reasons why it is important to my students to learn about contemporary art today. Scholars suggest that teachers should see themselves as facilitators who encourage students to have a more active role in his or her own learning. By providing a learning environment where investigation by asking questions lead to further research, my students gained confidence in their ability to create meaningful art. Throughout their research, Erickson & Villeneuve (2008) suggest that the incorporation of contemporary art in an art curriculum requires teachers to provide students with opportunities to gain knowledge through investigating through their own art making. I have seen my students actively engaged in their art making during the introduction of this research. Allowing my students to investigate contemporary themes, each student was able to create a piece of art, which resonates meaning to him or her.

What I found in my students through the introduction of contemporary art into my classroom was more enthusiasm for learning and making art. All the participants in my study

started with an idea and explored ways to convey their idea using recycled materials and learned much more along the way. Each learned how to use a variety of power tools in which they had never used before. My students continuously brainstormed on future ideas for artwork each would like to create. I found my students asking more questions and finding ways to research the answers. In the remaining sections of this paper, I will further describe my interpretations and the significance of this research. I will also make recommendations for further study.

Even though my students felt they didn't really learn specifically about any particular contemporary work of art, they felt the introduction of contemporary themes to the classroom had helped them become more engaged in art. It has also helped them want to research more contemporary artists and other ways they could communicate their ideas by using other non-traditional materials. My students have shared with me how their ideas have grown by using non-traditional materials. My students want to collaborate with one another to create a school sculpture using recycled materials. They have begged me everyday to continue on this path for the duration of the semester.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

Through this Capstone Project, I discovered several key factors about incorporating contemporary art into my curriculum. Introducing contemporary art and themes into my curriculum, I saw a change in my teaching and a change in my students' attitudes about art. I was convinced that my old way of teaching, which was to deliver a lesson where all outcomes were nearly all similar, had always been exciting for my students. However, I realized during this research, my students were much more engaged in their art making because their art became more personal. By using a contemporary theme and introducing my students to the awareness of contemporary artists, my students "came to life" so-to-speak. My students found a way to

creatively construct an idea by using materials they had never used before. My students were using nontraditional materials in a way that they hadn't explored. All of my participants were constantly thinking of new ways to use recycled materials. Each day, my students were coming up with new ideas that they were sharing between each other. This new excitement was a positive change in my classroom. Katie and Rene both decided to repurpose other art projects into something new based on the inspiration of their learning through this unit (see Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 19: Katie with a repurposed tie-dye pillowcase turned into a handbag



Figure 20: Rene's tie-dye T-shirt repurposed into another fashion

I learned that as I implemented contemporary themes into my classroom, my approach to teaching changed; I guided students and offered suggestions rather than dictated the outcome of my students' work. I allowed each student the time to ask questions every day. As I observed students working on their projects, I allowed them to investigate their own ideas. I took the role of asking my students questions instead of sharing my personal opinions about their work. I wanted to know what each of my students thought along the way. I chose to remain neutral and allow each student to work through his or her own idea.

I also learned my students craved learning how to build and construct using non-conventional materials and tools. This was a key learning experience for me as well as my students. Students were hesitant to first learn how to use many of the power tools needed to construct most of their artwork. It was interesting to see the fear of using a power tool for the first time and how the fear subsided with each experience. My students were very excited and eager to try new tools or to help another student who was unsure. It was interesting that each student was achieving foundational skills that will be beneficial to him or her in the future. By introducing contemporary art into my curriculum, I was able to improve my students' learning experience.

Significance, Implications, and Recommendations

For me, the most significant thing that occurred through my research was the shift in my teaching. Because of the introduction to contemporary art into my curriculum, I was able to achieve a better quality of teaching for my students. I was able to create a learning environment where my students felt safe and enthusiastic about learning something completely new. I was able to change simple teaching methods that allowed my students to create more meaningful artworks. Using contemporary themes and ideas have allowed me to want to create further units of study for other grade levels I teach.

My findings will be helpful to other middle school art educators who are willing to try something new. This research will enable other art educators to look at their own curriculums and try to find ways to incorporate contemporary ideas and themes into their classrooms. Not only is this information valuable to art educators, but also other educators who want to try theme-based units in teaching their content material.

I would recommend art educators who would like to incorporate contemporary art and ideas into their curriculum to develop a unit based on a theme. I would recommend allotting time to research the unit and ideas beforehand. There are many wonderful websites that encourage the inclusion of contemporary art into an educated learning environment. Two such websites are *Art 21*, (<http://www.pbs.org/art21/learning-with-art21/on-contemporary-art>) and *Art Today*, (<http://schools.walkerart.org>). If technology is part of the lesson or activity, planning ahead is a great way to ensure adequate working time. I would also recommend asking outside professionals who have specific skills that pertain to the unit or theme, to come to the classroom and demonstrate for the students. This could enhance student inquiry and open up great discussions and future lessons.

Through this study, I was able to look at my current teaching practices and shift to include more contemporary themes in my classrooms. Not only will I continue to explore ways to add to my current curriculum in 8th grade, I will develop new units for my 6th and 7th grade classes. I will research further ways to include more inquiry into each lesson. I will also share what I've learned in this Capstone Project with other middle school art educators in my county. I will continue to blog on my students' amazing work as they each progress through their learning and investigating. Because it is important to help keep my students up to date in their thinking, I will also continue to use a variety of resources in my classroom for my own learning.

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Appendix A

| UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research Protocol Submission Form | | | |
|---|---|--|---------------------------|
| <p><i>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.</i></p> | | | |
| Title of Protocol: | How does Contemporary Art fit into a Middle School Curriculum? | | |
| Principal Investigator: | Nicole Kirkpatrick | | UFID #: 1-419-5749 |
| Degree / Title: | MA in Art Education | Mailing Address: (If on campus include PO Box address): 200 Thornton's Creek Rd. Erwin, NC 28339 | Email: |
| Department: | School of Art and Art History | | Telephone #: |
| Co-Investigator(s): | | UFID#: | Email: |
| Supervisor (If PI is student): | Craig Roland | UFID#: | |
| Degree / Title: | PhD | Mailing Address: (If on campus include PO Box address): Norman Hall 1221 SW 5th Avenue Gainesville, FL 32611 | Email: |
| Department: | School of Art and Art History | | Telephone #: |
| Date of Proposed Research: | Fall, 2012 | | |
| Source of Funding (A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved): | None | | |
| | | | |

Scientific Purpose of the Study:

To develop an intergraded curriculum involving contemporary art into a middle school art classroom through a unit of study involving three art activities.

Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: (Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.)

I will observe student participants actively engaged in an intergraded curriculum where contemporary artists and their work will be viewed, studied and used as a way for students to gain knowledge in the current art world. Participants will work through three different art activities where each will be able to create works of art that communicate contemporary themes in their art work. Participants will be introduced to a female contemporary artist, a male contemporary artist and a collaborative community artwork. Participants will be able to choose a variety of art materials to convey their ideas directed by a simple prompt. Students will be able to gain knowledge of contemporary art practices by real world artists and then apply what they've learned to their own artwork. I will observe each participant's experience interacting and learning about contemporary art through a variety of teaching methods. The use of different teaching strategies such as individual and cooperative work will help identify easily adaptable ways to incorporate contemporary art into a middle school curriculum.

Participatory Action Research methods will be used for this specific study. Each aspect of the art activities will be monitored and recorded through the use of field notes, journaling, basic questionnaires, simple written interviews, and a photographic collection of student artwork on a blog. I will observe students working individually and within group activities. I will keep a journal of field notes and document these observations. I will have informal conversations individually and within group collaboration. I will take photographs of individual participants' work from the beginning idea to the finished artwork. There will be no participant who will be identified throughout this study. No participant will be identified or recognized through photographs in this study. I will write up my findings in a capstone paper, which will be deposited in the University of Florida's digital repository where master's theses and dissertations are housed. No participant will be pressured to participate in this study. All participants will have options to withdraw from this study at any point, from beginning to the end. All student participation will be completely voluntary. All participants will be treated fairly, justly and treated the same as other students not participating in this study. At any point throughout this study, participants will be allowed to withdraw from the study without prejudice and judgment.

Describe Potential Benefits: Benefits include increased knowledge of contemporary artists, contemporary approaches to current life issues and knowledge about a variety of materials to use in communicating and expressing ideas in art. Benefits also include new approaches to art making and multiple solutions to one problem. Knowledge learned through this study can be applied to everyday life outside the art classroom.**Describe Potential Risks:** (If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)

None

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited: Students will be already enrolled in my class.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---|--------------|
| Maximum Number of Participants (to be approached with consent) | 5 | Age Range of Participants: | 12-13 years old | 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.) I will ask volunteers from one of my 8 th grade classes. I will use a parental consent form. | | | | | |
| (SIGNATURE SECTION) | | | | | |
| Principal Investigator(s) Signature: | | | | | Date: |
| Co-Investigator(s) Signature(s): | | | | | Date: |
| Supervisor's Signature (if PI is a student): | | | | | Date: |
| Department Chair Signature: | | | | | Date: |

Appendix B

SEEING ART IN DIFFERENT WAYS

Desired Results

Goals: This goal will address how students will view contemporary art and artist today. Students will create a personal art piece by using a variety of tools and recycled materials by investigating different ways to construct and create a meaningful art piece. Students will be able to use a classroom blog site in order to research and answer questions about contemporary artist and their work.

Standards:

8.V.2. Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.
(8.V.2.3.) Create original art that conveys one or more ideas or feelings.

8.V.3. Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.
(8.V.3.2.) Use a variety of media to create art.

8.CX.2. Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.
(8.CX.2.4.) Exemplify the use of visual images from media sources and technological products to communicate in artistic contexts.

Understandings:

Students will understand that...

- Contemporary artists create art from a variety of materials
- Contemporary artists use their art to communicate personal meaning
- Contemporary artists use a variety of technical skills in creating their art
- Some art conveys meaning better than others
- Using resources help with idea generating

Essential Questions:

What materials do contemporary artists use in creating art?

(How is art made today?)

Why do contemporary artists choose to use recycled materials and what are they trying to say?

What are the statements contemporary artists are saying with their artwork?

(Does it have meaning to you?)

(Is it confusing to you?)

What skills do contemporary artists need to create personal artworks?

Students will know...

- How contemporary art is made by viewing a variety of contemporary art
- How contemporary artists use their skills and knowledge about a specific topic
- What topics or themes contemporary artists are creating art to communicate
- How to use a variety of recycled material to communicate their idea
- How to research artists to gather ideas about own art

Students will be able to...

- View a variety of contemporary art to gain insight and ideas to investigate their own personal ideas
- Gather information through investigation
- Design and create one of their ideas into a final personal art piece
- Investigate contemporary artists to gather personal information
- Use a classroom blog site to record individual findings

Assessments

Performance Tasks:

- View connections students make by viewing contemporary art made by artists today
- Document ideas students have in search of their own art
- View students designs of their artwork on paper
- Compile a list of materials needed in student's design
- Evaluate skills students use when using specific tools
- Critique final piece
- Record findings on class blog site

Other Evidence:

- One-on-one feedback between art teacher and student
- Observations throughout each design process
- Note taking and documenting through photographic images
- Questionnaire
- Discussion on final critique
- Blog site share and discuss

Learning Plan

Students will look at a variety of contemporary art by contemporary artists such as, Ai Weiwei, Red, Andrew Meyers and Haroshi. Discuss the variations in artwork, what students see, what students like/dislike. This can be in a form of written questions given to the students as images are being shown. ([handout 1](#)) Discuss what materials the artists are using in their artwork and take note of those materials.

Make a list with the students of all possible materials art could be made from. Example: old toys, plastic bottles, plastic bottle caps, newspaper, wire, old soda cans, old CD's, old art materials such as broken rulers and crayons, old shoes and clothing. This list gets pretty exciting when students really start thinking about items they may have lying around at home.

Explain students should come up with an idea that resonates meaning to them, such as a memory or a special place they visited.

For example: Creating a picture based on an event such as movie tickets, or concert tickets. The list is endless. Students should at least brainstorm 3-5 different ideas along with the materials they could possibly use and choose the best one out of those ideas.

Once students have chosen their idea, they will need to write in detail what the idea is, what materials they will use, what tools (power tools) they will need to construct it and why they chose this idea. In other words, how does this idea relate to them?

Allow students time to collect materials and tools and designate time for students to construct their ideas.

Manage and evaluate student progress along the way. Pose questions and encourage inquiry as students work through their ideas.

Present ([handout 2](#)) questionnaire paper to students. Allow students several days to research artists and gather information on one artist of choice (from listed artists in handout). Students will answer questions on handout and transfer new knowledge about artist to their classroom blog site. Discuss with students how the class blog site can be used as a ways to track their personal interests in the art world. Ask questions to generate future ideas for students to blog about.

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Parents and Students

Title of Protocol: How to Incorporate Contemporary Art Into a Middle School Curriculum

Principle Investigator: Nicole Kirkpatrick

In order to make an informed decision, please read this consent document carefully before you or your child decides to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: To develop an intergraded curriculum involving contemporary art into a middle school art classroom through a unit of study involving three art activities.

What you will be asked to do in the study: All participants will be introduced to three different contemporary artists and their style of work. Participants will learn about a variety of art material that is used to communicate and express ideas in their artwork. Students will be given opportunities to create a work of art by the use of a directed prompt where investigation and inquiry will take place. Participants will be able to create multiple solutions and narrow down their ideas to one to create a final artwork. Activities will include individual investigation through research, group collaboration, informal conversations, sketchbook drawing and planning. These activities are not different than other activities students experience in their art class, but are expressed with a deeper and more personal meaning in their outcome. The goal is for students to develop a better understanding of what contemporary art is and how contemporary art can be included into their current art curriculum today.

Time required for study: One class period for one semester

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks expected with this study. Benefits from this study would be knowledge about contemporary artist and art and approaches to current life issues. Students will benefit from learning about alternative materials to communicating through their art. I hope this study improves current art curriculum by including contemporary art.

Compensation: No student will be compensated for this study.

Confidentiality: Your child's identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Participant information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting his or her name to this number will be kept in a locked file in my office. When the study is complete and data analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Participant names will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation: Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You or your child has the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence. You or your child has the right to withdraw your consent after the study is complete, through the end of the year and after final grades are posted.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Attention Dr. Craig Roland

School of Art and Art History
University of Florida
101 FAC
P.O. Box 115801
Gainesville, FL 32611-5801
(352) 392-9165
rolandc@ufl.edu

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone (352) 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I understand that as a student in this class, participation in this study is not required. I voluntarily agree to participate in the project and I have received a copy of this description. I understand that the project is to be completed in class just the same as all other normal daily activities. If you would be willing to participate in this study, please sign and date your assent below.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

I agree to the above terms and allow my child to participate in this research project. I allow my child's artwork and information to be used within the research study as well as inclusive to the capstone paper.

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

List of Figures with Figure Captions

Figure 1: Setting up classroom blog site

Figure 2: Working on technical issues on blog site

Figure 3: Learning how to use a wood-burning tool

Figure 4: Showing a student how to use a drill

Figure 5: Smashed bottle caps

Figure 6: Recycled plastic bottle art

Figure 7: Recycled CD

Figure 8: Melissa cutting outside of softballs

Figure 9: Katie working on her sculpture

Figure 10: Rachel's recycled CD's

Figure 11: Jack working with wood burner

Figure 12: Katie connecting her cups to form a sculpture

Figure 13: Slim applying gesso

Figure 14: Melissa working with a hot glue gun

Figure 15: Rene working with multiple materials

Figure 16: Jack's Wood Art

Figure 17: Katie's Light Sculpture

Figure 18: Rene's CD Art

Figure 19: Katie with a repurposed tie-dye pillowcase turned into a handbag

Figure 20: Rene's tie-dye T-shirt repurposed into another fashion

Author Biography

The author of this Capstone paper is currently an art educator at a middle school in North Carolina. She has been teaching art in the middle school for eight consecutive years. She taught studio pottery briefly at a local college in North Carolina prior to working in the public school system. Nicole Kirkpatrick holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Studio Art from the University of Campbell. She plans to graduate from The University of Florida with a Masters degree in Art Education, which will allow her to follow her life long dream of becoming a college professor. Nicole regularly heads a collaborative meeting with all area middle school art teachers. She attends many workshops in a wide range of art mediums all over North Carolina. She also teaches a pottery class to adults several times a week. Mrs. Kirkpatrick lives with her husband and two children in North Carolina, but hopes to move back to her home state of Ohio.