

ART WITH PURPOSE: PROMOTING COMPASSION THROUGH ART

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

The purpose of this study was to create a curriculum designed to instill compassion in students through the art making process and to study what happens in the classroom as this curriculum unfolded. The ultimate goals of the curriculum were to provide students with opportunities to be compassionate and inspire maturity of selfless behaviors through intrinsic motivation and Artmaking. Compassion, caring, empathy, and kindness were defined in this study as key components of the curriculum. Using Participatory Action Research, I studied an art making project that I developed and implemented called “Altered Puzzles”. The art project was designed to promote awareness of autism by involving my high school art students in collaborative art making with younger students from a special needs class in my school. The findings of my study suggest successful development of communication, understanding, and exhibition of compassion in action amongst my students. I conclude that compassion through Artmaking is just one of many tools possible to generate social reform, improve character development, and foster tolerance amongst high school aged students. My research also

culminated in the creation of a collection of resources relating to the theme of compassion:

<http://pinterest.com/stepickens/compassion-thru-art/> and a website devoted to this project

<http://www.stephaniepickens.com/capstone-project.html>.

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Special needs, financial destruction, emotional distress, divorce, abuse, and death are just a few of the pitfalls in life. High school students are dealing with these issues everyday; if they are not dealing with them, someone in their life or community is likely struggling somehow. Showing compassion for others, and understanding their needs and problems can both make a difference in someone else's life and at the same time strengthen the personal and moral development of the individual engaged in compassionate behaviors. Art educators should take advantage of opportunities to foster such positive behaviors in the art room.

After eight years of teaching, I discovered that students sometimes display a sense of entitlement. Some seem to act as if this world revolves around them individually. Such self-centeredness is understandable, given the conditions of their own lives, but I also believe that high school students are also quite capable of selflessness and caring toward others. My goal in this study was to examine this proposition; that is, I wanted to create an art curriculum that promotes compassion through artmaking with others. My study's commitment was to foster positive, selfless attributes from each of my students by creating opportunities for them to engage in art practices that demonstrate their increased levels of compassions towards others.

Research Statement

This study was meant to promote and study compassionate behaviors in a high school art class. Using my own classroom, I provided opportunities for students to create art for the benefit of someone other than the individual artist and to explore how students behave when given such opportunities. My proposition was that if my art instruction introduces concepts of understanding, empathy, and caring, then perhaps my students would exhibit sensitive and compassionate behaviors towards others. I believe, as Kessler (2005) that art, created with such a purpose, can be beneficial to both the artist and viewer. However, how does this view work in an

art classroom setting? Can art created for the benefit for someone else help foster a more compassionate student or group of students?

Exhibiting compassionate behaviors was one of the explicit lessons taught during this curriculum study. In this case, my high school students got to know and socially relate to students with special needs, as my students and special needs students worked together on art projects. The special needs students were brought into my art classroom and were given the chance to create an altered puzzle work of art with my students. Through the altered puzzle project, all of the students were expected to work in groups, plan designs, peer teach, and create an overall product together. Their collaborative work was based on concepts of autism and developing knowledge about special needs students. The art students in my class were expected to interact and learn to manage or tolerate any atypical behaviors exhibited by the students with special needs. Since the special needs students could have exhibited behaviors that general education students are not familiar with, the general education students had opportunities to show character traits such as understanding, awareness, compassion, and empathy during this project. All students were working towards the same goal. Successfully completed, the project is expected to be on display within the school for this school year.

As I observed the behaviors of my students, some of the questions I asked include: How might collaborative artmaking involve compassion? Can artmaking be successful both as a work of art and as compassion-based activity? Is compassion a useful construct for contemporary art education? What are potential learning outcomes of positive hidden curriculum in a high school art classroom? In what ways do my students engage compassionate thinking and compassionate behaviors through this art making activity?

Purpose or Goals of the Curriculum Study

The goal of my curriculum under study was to foster and examine compassionate student behaviors using collaborative artmaking as the vehicle. Some of the compassionate behaviors that I hoped to see as a result of the curriculum were kindness, tolerance, respect, and patience with other students. My ultimate purpose was to encourage my students to take these behaviors and practice them throughout each day, and not just when teachers expect it from them. Some of the ways students might show these behaviors could include eating lunch with a student who has no friends, giving back through community involvement, and sharing their art knowledge and skills with students who perform at various levels of achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions and sub-questions guided this curriculum investigation: My main question was: How can artmaking foster compassion? Sub-questions for this question included (a) how can compassion influence artmaking? (b) what are potential learning outcomes of positive hidden curriculum in a high school art classroom? (c) in what ways can compassion be encouraged and implemented through a collaborative artmaking process? and (d) how do the kinds of desirable student compassionate behaviors fostered in my classroom extend beyond the classroom walls?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

For the purpose of this study, I referred to my approach of combining art making with compassion as “compassionate art making.” There are a number of likely benefits that can occur when students engage in the process of compassionate artmaking. First, students who begin to put compassion in action build social skills that are valuable in life. Put simply, they develop healthier personality attributes (Cook, 2009). Second, compassionate artmaking might lead to

students becoming more engaged outside of the art room as seen through the studies of Ruth Faison and her psychiatric research using compassion-based art making (Marable, 2006). Finally, as an educator myself, I too often witness selfish personality flaws that plague the behaviors of many teenagers. If art educators like me can teach students to think more about the others around them, these students' potential, development, and value in this culture will improve (Walker, 2001). Teachers are central in this proposition. We can demonstrate to students how to act in positive manners that might not be familiar to them at first. Through art instruction and production, we can create opportunities for students to integrate compassionate thinking and action into real world experiences, thereby preparing our students for life outside of high school.

How teachers can model and instill compassion (sometimes also understood as caring, empathy, and/or understanding) is the focus of this study. The outcome of my curriculum was an artwork created collaboratively by my students. The product of my study is a published video, companion website, and this capstone paper that share my research and findings.

Assumptions

The key assumption of this study was that students will either behave as the educator tells them to behave or that the student will behave for the educator as though in a performance. I also assumed that some students would do what they are asked in the beginning or even throughout the study, but revert to ways unbecoming of this research topic. I believe that students will learn and exhibit compassionate behaviors when they are shown how to do so. Lastly, I believe that this was also a positive experience for me, acting as the teacher, the curriculum designer, and the researcher.

Definition of Terms

Terms discussed in this study include compassion, empathy, and character. Compassion is described by emotional intelligence author Steve Hein (n.d.) as:

...a combination of empathy and understanding. Greater empathy gives you greater information, and the more information you have on something, the more likely you are to understand it. Higher emotional intelligence makes possible a greater capacity for such understanding. Thus, the logical sequence is as follows: Higher emotional sensitivity and awareness leads to higher levels of empathy. This leads to higher levels of understanding, which then leads to higher levels of compassion. (<http://eqi.org/empathy.htm>, para. 13)

Hein (n.d.) goes on to define empathy in the following way, “To show empathy is to identify with another's feelings. It is to emotionally put yourself in the place of another, to evoke a kind tone. The ability to empathize is directly dependent on your ability to feel your own feelings and identify them” (<http://eqi.org/empathy.htm>, para. 1).

Character is another word described in this study by way of building student intrinsic motivation and solidifying positive personality traits. Kessler (2000) describes character as simply a description of one’s positive moral and ethical behaviors.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations within this study that there are no generalizations beyond this group of students. This group was a specific demographic of higher middle class and wealthy students and intact as such. The students in this study are mainly from a high income demographic located in the Southeastern United States. The classroom was made up of students 14-18 years of age and with a class size of 40 students. The period of the study was 10 days and each class period met approximately 50 minutes each day. The limited time span in which the

study took place limited the findings to what can be ascertained in the time span given. This study was not looking at related things such as additional behaviors that go with this type of activity and other learned results. The study was conducted for this context specific information.

The study sought to identify, observe, and describe compassionate action, although this topic could elicit other actions and reactions when put into play in the classroom curriculum. This study was limited to the context specific media from a defined group of students being observed for a specific behavior.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates the ways in which art education can be an effective tool in developing compassion in students. How can educators teach compassion using art? The supporting ideas that answer this question are through the role of the educator, character development, hidden and experiential curriculum, interdisciplinary learning, and integration. Discussed in this review are several published works detailing these elements of developing compassionate behavior in students, as well as examples of positive results of those who used art to do so.

Compassion and Related Terms

To begin, Steve Hein (n.d.), author of an emotional intelligence website, defines compassion as:

...a combination of empathy and understanding. Greater empathy gives you greater information, and the more information you have on something, the more likely you are to understand it. Higher emotional intelligence makes possible a greater capacity for such understanding. Thus, the logical sequence is as follows: Higher emotional sensitivity and awareness leads to higher levels of empathy. This leads to higher levels of understanding, which then leads to higher levels of compassion. (<http://eqi.org/empathy.htm>, para. 15)

Hein's website has many pages dedicated to the understanding and implementation of compassion as well as other positive character and personality attributes. The author also describes the ways in which empathy, caring, compassion, and understanding are used to help someone else in an emotional state of need. In a similar reading, John Fein (2003) discusses Nel Nodding's description of caring as having three components: conceptual and emotive understanding; deep positive regard and respect for the feeling and intrinsic value of another soul; and the motivation, willingness, and skills to act to protect and enhance these feelings, values and rights. Fein goes on to describe caring as more of an action word that should be acted upon as well as an opposite to words like cruelty and indifference. Caring shifts in this presentation to the word compassion, because of its close nature to empathy and understanding as a combination in presence (Fein, 2003). In this literature review, the word compassion also represents other closely descriptive positive personality traits such as empathy, caring, and understanding.

With compassion now defined, this literature review will attempt to identify whether and how compassion may develop through educational opportunities, and more specifically, educational opportunities related to artmaking. While a significant amount of research describes compassionate activities, compassion as it relates to a topic, compassion as a moral compass for one's life, and compassion as it relates to empathy, there is very little research that describes how compassion develops within high school art classrooms.

Role of the Educator

The role of the teacher is an important aspect of teaching compassion in art. For instance, Marable (2006) noted that Ruth Fasion Shaw integrated finger paint in art classrooms and in psychiatric therapy. Shaw was very influential in Rome, Italy by impressing the concept of

creativity as an integral part of a healthy personality (Marable, 2006). Similarly Alana Cook (2009), once named *teacher of the year* at Maple Ridge Secondary, writes in *Teaching us Humanity: The Importance of Keeping Compassion in the Classroom* that “students will be the most engaged when they feel as though you care about them” (p. 1). Teachers’ actions influence student thinking, learning, and behavior in the classroom. Teachers are the starting point for this study and representative of compassionate behavior.

Character Development

The character and personality of artists and art educators are acting examples for how compassion can be admirable. For example, one artist, Kathy Tacke from Kansas City, MO states that she has “a passionate pursuit” (cited in Gamble, 2004, p. 22) for what she teaches. She goes on to describe reasons why she teaches art and how important art education is at the elementary level. Tacke says, “If I can make the learning more meaningful, it will be remembered for a longer period of time” (cited in Gamble, 2004, p. 24). As Nel Noddings observes, “When we care, we want to do our very best for the objects of our care” (1995, p. 675). Teachers who truly care make big impressions, and students can tell the difference.

Caring teachers exist from elementary to college often with a similar goal, to educate with meaning and compassion. Daphne Hill exemplifies this approach. Hill is an artist in California who teaches with character and meaning. An article written for *UCLA Today* paints Hill as an excellent educator who has brought her own fears to the forefront in order to help others. Hill, who educates doctors on compassion through art, creates artwork of sexually transmitted diseases and often includes samples of what the microscopic disease looks like. Such diseases are associated with the need for compassion by mankind due the severity of the affliction. She uses these exhibits to teach new doctors how to see patients as people and puts

these diseases in perspective (Lin, 2010). Her work involves ideas later discussed in this review, such as hidden and experiential curriculum, interdisciplinary and integration, and character education. Just like Hill, other educators play a crucial role when it comes to their students' character development within art education.

The Hidden and Experiential Curriculum

Two potential ways of developing students' compassion is through hidden and experiential curricula. Through personal philosophies and methodologies delicately intertwined in the unspoken curriculum (also known as hidden), students learn about concepts such as compassion without ever realizing the transmission of such a construct. Philosopher and educator Nel Noddings (1995) has written extensively about caring in schools and caring through art-based learning, but her article "Teaching Themes of Care" reflects a clear listing and explanation of why caring is crucial through the arts. Her discussion lists points of importance such as cultural literacy, academic connections, existential questioning, and personal connections. She states, "Caring implies a continuous search for competence" (p. 675) and "[Students] can be led to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to make positive contributions, regardless of the occupation they may choose" (p. 675). Like students, teachers want to be competent in what they do in the classroom.

Noddings' article suggests that both the role of the student as well as the educator benefit from hidden curriculum behaviors, and there are many fine example of this kind of *caring practice* amongst artists and art educators. Artist, Carrie Mae Weems uses a form of hidden curriculum in her art practice itself, acknowledging that the hidden curriculum looks like so many different things and it easily tucks into any lesson (Sollins & Dowling, 2009). Beth Bearden (2011), another artist educator using the hidden curriculum with deliberation, writes

indirectly about this topic describing ten lessons art teaches students. These ten lessons include problem solving, perspective, experience, and communication. She goes on to describe how important her role as an educator is with influencing the demeanor of the students on a daily basis. Bearden is an experienced teacher who desires to develop her students' whole selves and sense of compassion in the classroom through art (Bearden, 2011). For Bearden, actively promoting compassion through art is a positive attribute that would influence demeanor in an art room.

As these examples demonstrate, students experience the hidden curriculum through the nature of interactions in the classroom. Rebecca Carver refers to the phenomenon of the hidden curriculum as the *experiential curriculum*. Rebecca Carver (1996) describes experiential educational practices by way of authenticity, active learning, and drawing on experience, and connections to future opportunities. In her article, she references the true value of a teacher with pedagogical principles that cultivate an environment for learning and nurturing students. She gives a detailed framework for how a classroom can facilitate a successful topic such as compassion. Like Noddings, Carver believes that starting with caring educators who use common sense in curriculum shaping, teachers can build self-esteem, safe environments, and competent art students. From teachers acting as positive role models to students engaging in thoughtful and caring role-playing, experiential education is a potential means of developing compassion in an art education setting.

Interdisciplinary Learning

Project-based learning with an interdisciplinary approach in art successfully uses a problem-solving methodology and helps students to make real life connections. Interdisciplinary lessons in art can develop more empathetic and compassionate students through cooperative

working, conceptual thinking, and personality development. In *Rethinking Curriculum in Art*, Stewart and Walker (2001) discuss at length the topic of interdisciplinary learning and observe, “students are helped to apply their new understandings to life situations, to demonstrate their achievement through performance tasks and projects often in contexts other than those strictly associated with the school” (p. 13). Stewart and Walker describe how to help students make real and meaningful connections to artwork. They believe that connections to emotion, history, or English are interdisciplinary and integrated forms of learning. Building on their work, I believe that through art, compassion can be a building block for character as well as support for interdisciplinary growth. Group work, social interactions, and peer-to-peer learning are possible interdisciplinary actions that develop compassionate personalities.

An artist educator that implements this concept, Lynn Sanders-Bustle (2008), has an excellent idea for teaching students through interdisciplinary concepts. Her article “Visual Artifact Journals as Creative and Critical Springboards for Meaning Making” discusses journaling as a means to educate students through visual studies and written reflections. These journals allow students to record visual information that they remember, know, or learn just as they would in an English or History course. Students are able to keep records of personal feelings and reactions to the lessons or students in the classroom. The recorded emotions can encourage recognition of caring for others or problem solving, a growth point of social development.

Another example of an artist who uses interdisciplinary concepts with her own artwork is Carrie Mae Weems. She describes her art in the PBS: Art 21 video *Compassion* (Sollins & Dowling, 2009). Weems documents the life and times, even struggles and victories, of black American culture through recreation, discussion, photography, and journaling (Weems, 2011).

While her work is mainly photography, the conceptual idea of compassionate action she uses through art is essentially the same as what could be used with lessons for high school students. Her journaling process is also very similar to what I currently teach in high school art. Weems includes a large amount of history as she recreates famous historical events that evoke a sense of compassion, an interdisciplinary and hidden curriculum idea students could use when creating their own art (Sollins & Dowling, 2009). Weems is very influential with her uses of compassionate art making as a means to reach someone in a meaningful manner.

Integration

Besides the actions and modeling behaviors of educators and artists, certain artworks and exhibits are great resources for integrating compassion into a curriculum. For instance, the Jack Blanton Museum of Art provides students and teachers with an exhibit based on empathy. This exhibit, entitled *Learning Empathy Through Art*, can be found in the museum and online in lesson plans guiding their learning (*Learning Empathy Through Art*, n.d.). Their website has a materials list, objectives, connections, procedures, related links and the lesson to teach students about the art on exhibit. Students can explore empathy on their own personal visit or through a teacher guided class visit. Museums are an additional educational opportunity for students to learn how to put compassion in action through art.

The most important and the most relevant reading I have found about integrating and developing compassion in student behavior was written by educator Rachael Kessler. Her work centers on how to integrate “soul” into the classroom. Kessler’s work transcends the idea of interdisciplinary learning through real life experiences, but also strongly focuses on experiential curriculum such as introducing death to her students. She tells the story of her students and their journey with a classmate who died (Kessler, 2000). Kessler’s work is quite evocative and

indicative of compassionate behavior taught through art because of the richness of description of her emotional and authentic lessons. She did not stop there; she created a website soon after this story and creates a business of bringing compassion, connections, and character to the classroom (Kessler, 2005). Between art exhibits, online learning, classroom lessons, and real life adventures, teachers can integrate compassion in action through art just as Kessler demonstrates.

Historical Significance

Looking back at this topic of study, my historical sources suggest that character is organic, and that studies about children often make adults “more sympathetic and tactile in dealing with them” (Bailey, 1903). Bailey further advocates that teaching compassion would be a viable possibility in the classroom and that students can learn to become compassionate beings. In an article now over a century old, “Character and Conduct,” Alexander (1893) observes, “...permanent character depends on the permanent associations of our ideas of conduct” (p. 485). This is thought to mean that those who are taught and learned to show compassion will reflect these lessons later in life as well.

Dating back to the Middle Ages, this idea of positive, compassionate behavior through art is reflective as important (Laing, 1903, p. 63). Ethical values and a Christian spirit were expected behaviors during this period, thus artists reflected these actions in their art naturally. An example, one of the best-known Christian art symbols, the Madonna, is “the greatest ethical conception of the Middle Ages” (Laing, 1903, p. 63). This figure depicts a motherly woman with a compassionate and caring demeanor. Facilitating compassionate conduct through art is both a contemporary and historical concept.

In Conclusion

While educating students through caring-based artmaking processes, one can understand how compassionate behavior may be facilitated. Compassion, also worded as empathy, understanding, sympathy, or caring is important in art education. Regardless of the name, the goal in this literature review was to demonstrate some ways in which art education can be an effective tool in developing compassion in students. Meaningful and purposeful art makes for vested students regardless of what they create. Vested students can become successful adults contributing positively in society. This review has highlighted the ways in which art makers, art educators, and museum educators are able to and have made caring a priority, supporting the idea that meaningful art education is important to developing compassion in high school students.

Methodology

The method of research for this topic of study was Participatory Action Research (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). I expected to observe approximate 40 students in the classroom of a public high school located in the Southeastern United States. Most of the students come from high-income homes and are well established in this community. I expected to implement a project using puzzle pieces and sketchbook designs. These works of art were created in groups of 4-7 students and the assignment was based on the topic of compassion and autism awareness.

Students were observed for their communication and behaviors towards each other and notes were made after each session. They were taught several lessons ahead of time using the Socratic style of discussion, questions leading to other questions. This discussion moved into an artmaking lesson of altered puzzle design. While the students worked, I looked for and kept

notes documenting instances in which students exhibited compassionate behaviors, caring gestures, understanding in peer teaching, and empathy for other students. The result was a journal of my teacher observations that assisted me in determining whether and how student compassionate behaviors can be promoted using art in a high school classroom.

Subjects

I did my study with high school students, ages 14-19, in an art classroom located in the southern US. These students are generally middle to upper-middle class students who come from financially affluent families. There are approximately 40 students per class, but the study did not include every one of the students. I observed approximately 10-15 students during my research period. The students I teach range in ability, but are mainly general education or gifted education population. For the purpose of my study, these students were integrated with special needs students from my school who are of below average intelligence and vary in abilities including non-verbal and autistic. The special needs students were not specifically observed for this study. Rather they were the basis for involving my research subjects in acts of compassion in the artroom.

Research Site

I conducted research in a public high school where I am currently employed. The location is in the southeastern section of the United States, in a suburban neighborhood 30 miles from a major city. The classroom is one of two art classrooms in this public high school, though the other classroom was not conducive for this study.

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Through informal discussions, written evaluations and observations I hoped to collect data to determine how to promote compassion in high school students using art as the catalyst. I

collected data from students in my high school art classes. This collection included journal writing by me about each day's observations, questionnaires that I administered with the students, photographs of student work, and photographs of students working and participating in events. I analyzed the data collected in the study for roughly a period of three weeks. My data analysis of the reactions and conversations by the participants were to determine changes needed, if any, to the curriculum. These evaluations and determinations were daily and various times throughout the process. Changes to my curriculum varied as the project unfolded due to individual growth, social necessity, or group progress. My hope was that this study promoted positive changes to the classroom environment, educational practices, art curriculum, and personal actions of all involved. At the end of the study, I produced a capstone paper, reporting the findings of my study in a high school art classroom, as well as a website and a video.

Data Analysis Procedures

I planned to use both a holistic approach (review of the whole) to research analysis as well as objectives based (specific measurements) analysis for this Participatory Action Research (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). I had conversations with students and gave them a questionnaire that was open ended. Once the students responded, I was able to determine from this feedback holistically what their thoughts and opinions were about the process of learning about compassionate behaviors using artmaking. I was also able to analyze how many of the students could emotionally connect with this topic and determine percentages of the class that engaged in one area or another. I reviewed students' personality, behavior, and verbalization about the process. I watched for specific, unprompted behaviors that involved the curriculum. I also reviewed the class reactions with large group discussion and surveys. I reviewed my observational journals and students' questionnaire answers to determine results. Both areas of

analysis are effective and were used in this study, but a holistic approach (looking and reflecting more globally across data sets and within the classroom) was best suited for a study that seeks to evoke emotion and relies on impressions about the immeasurable subject of art.

Limitations

There are no generalizations beyond this group of students. This group is a specific demographic of higher middle class and wealthy students and intact as such. The students in this study are from a middle to high income demographic located in the south. The classroom was made up of students 14-19 years of age and with a class size of at least 40 students. The class time frame is 50 minutes long and includes setup, studio production or lecture, and cleanup of materials. Research observation was limited to this class structure and number of minutes within a single class period. This study was not looking at related things such as additional behaviors that go with this type of activity and other learned results. The study was observed for this context specific information.

Compassionate action is what the study observed, though this topic could have elicited other actions and reactions when put in the classroom curriculum. It appears though that both traditional and adaptive art programs build relationships, improve creative thinking, and impress compassionate behaviors to all involved. Ultimately, students and teachers alike usually develop respect and understanding for each other through school art programs, therefore no significant difficulties were expected. This study was limited to the context specific media from a defined group of students being observed for a specific behavior.



Figure 1. Altered Puzzle artwork

Findings

The goal of this curriculum research project was to encourage and influence compassionate behaviors in high school students through artmaking. The purpose of my research was to observe what happens in the classroom when such a curriculum based on compassion was implemented. The idea behind the curriculum was to create positive influential behaviors helping to redirect selfishness into selfless actions. Combining two groups of students with various levels of communication and creative abilities in a collaborative artmaking unit, this curriculum unit and study promoted compassion through art by using hidden curriculum or behavior modeling, project-based learning, and participatory action research. Students were given the opportunity to discover life lessons such as kindness, tolerance, and patience in the controlled setting of an art

room in their high school through a group-making art project called *Altered Puzzle* (see Figure 1). Educators, the guest teacher, the paraprofessionals, and myself, modeled compassionate behaviors so that students were directly exposed to positive, yet veiled learning models. When teachers model positive behaviors, students respond better and more authentically to what they are learning. I feel strongly that students must see genuine, honest character traits in educators to truly grasp the concepts being taught. Students must experience and see the life within ideas and lessons.

Artmaking has a history of developing emotional connections and forming communication between people, and this project was no different. What I discovered is that compassion in action causes reactions and stirs emotions. These reactions occur with both students and adult observers alike. Also, I found that compassion was defined through actions allowing all participants to better understand its meaning. I even discuss my reaction to this project and what it means for my classroom in the future. In the following sections, I describe in better detail the how compassionate behavior was fostered through this art curriculum and some of the effects on those involved.

Making Friends

Words like kind, patient, and compassion are often used in our vocabulary and the meanings are understood, but putting them to practice is surprisingly overwhelming for many students. The art project designed for this study was a perfect venue to explore that opportunity. The project asked high school students to work with special needs students in a collaborative artmaking activity. Throughout the lesson, my high school students expressed their concern with their own reactions. Most of my students were nervous about handling the awkward and socially different behaviors of our guest students. They were not sure what to say or how to act. It did not

take long for them to adjust and make connections to the special needs students invited to participate, though, as my high school students later told me. I believe that they began early in the process to experience true compassion from within. They exhibited patience with the least little action or kindness when someone needed help. How to act became natural when the class period began each day. The students own positive response was shocking for them and they even felt successful as they later shared with the group. It seemed to me that my high school students were unselfish, putting the needs of others before their own needs. I think they were pleasantly surprised at what self-sacrificing behavior felt and looked like.

Altruism was a learned and often-uncomfortable behavior until my high school students saw and felt the reaction of the others affected by their acts of kindness. When the project began, the several of my high school art students seemed vulnerable and emotionally insecure. Their communication skills were lacking where words were abundant before. They just didn't seem to know how to talk concretely about things like caring and compassion. As the project unfolded, these students' awkward expressions soon transformed into acts of respect, sharing, teaching, patience, and kindness. They told me that the new behaviors they were developing in my classroom also began to resonate within the hearts of each person affected by compassion in action. Students were able to act on compassion without being prompted, and they recognized these acts as acts of compassion. The students knew what to do from practice and observation.

Guest students started to experience what compassion can look like when they were treated with respect and others (my high school students) who were kind to them. Many of our guest students reported to me that they felt like they had friends for the first time ever. The art project successfully brought together unlikely students as simply students (see Figure 2). There was also a spillover effect. Outside of the classroom, the artists from my classroom were found

eating lunch and chatting with the guest students outside of class even. Without being asked, my students began to help the paraprofessionals get students off the bus in the mornings. Several of my students are now actively involved in the Special Olympics and special needs club. One student even shared her own artwork of journaling (see Figure 3) created at home with her sister who has special needs. She shared that she and her sister had found a new connection because of this idea of selfless, empathetic artmaking. None of the compassionate behaviors exhibited outside of class were prompted, required, or asked of any student involved in this project. These students began to share their newly practices character traits based on their own expertise.



Figure 2. Altered Puzzle artmaking

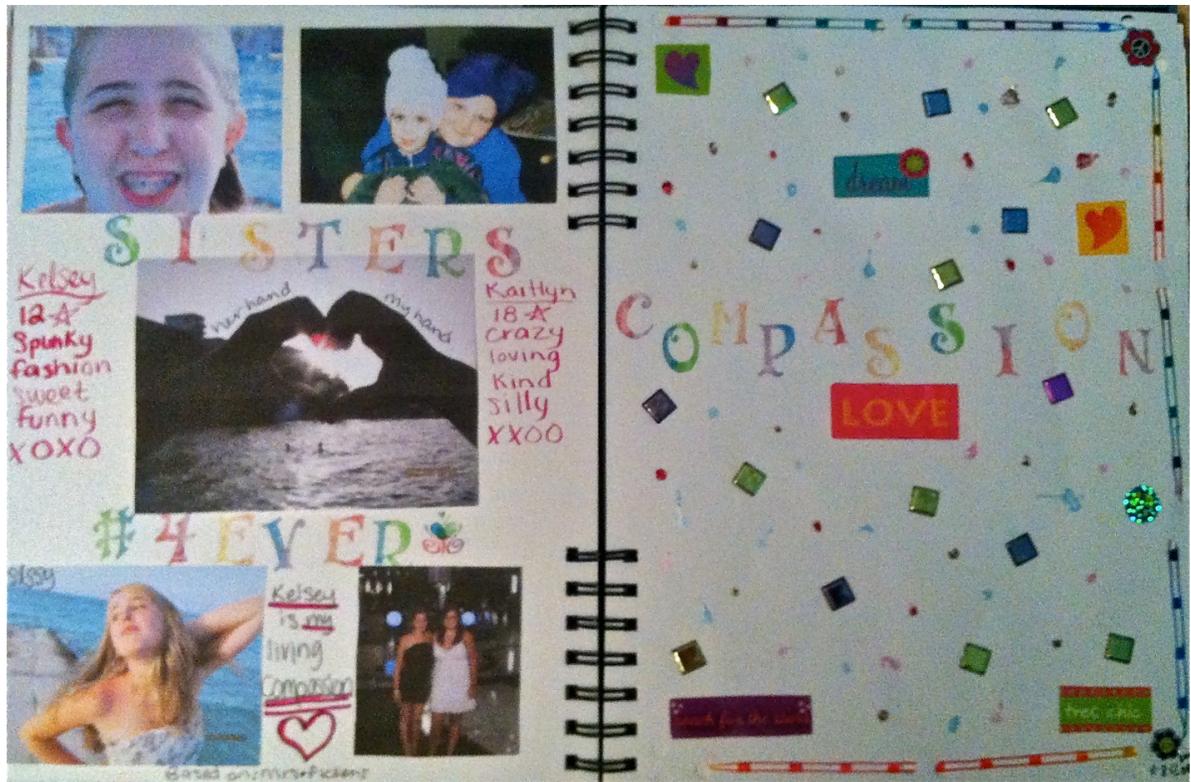


Figure 3. Compassion influenced student artwork

Many students and teachers noticed these positive character-building behaviors developing. Viewers of the project and classroom, teachers and students from other classrooms who came to see the project, were able to recognize what they believed to be engaged learning (see Figure 4), character building, and kindness in action. Students, teachers, and viewers alike were all privy to the true meaning of compassion in action when they experienced the altered puzzle artmaking project in my classroom.



Figure 4. Collaborative artmaking

Autism Speaks

Room 1551 quickly became the place to be for several adults and students from the surrounding classrooms while the project was taking place. Adults from other classrooms, such as the media specialist, teachers, and paraprofessionals, would wander into the room to see what my students were doing and why the unusual commotion. They would often just stare in amazement at the collaborative art making they saw. The kids worked tirelessly together helping each other out, coming up with new ideas, socializing, and creating a work of art. Sometimes there was no one speaking, but somehow a group of 5 or more students created art together as a whole without much direction. The students worked it out successfully. Guest students consisted of nonverbal, gifted, special needs, and many of them general education, but when this project was in action “students” meant the same thing and all were equal entities. They balanced each

other out with differences blending together like gray scales. These students shared a true sense of compassion, of being fully engaged in the artmaking. Seeing this tugged at the heartstrings of the adults that encountered the art.

Several adults that came into the room would get teary eyed when I would discuss what we were doing or even when they simply looked at the artwork. Many of them asked about the project details and left wanting to know more about the students. They would say that they had a stronger sense of emotion and understanding of compassion than when they arrived. They even had a better respect for artmaking. They saw what art could do for the soul. This positive and emotional reaction came from adults not only in the room, but also from administration around the county. It did not take long, word got out about what was happening in that room. It seemed everyone was deeply touched by the project.

Reactions from the adult viewers were overwhelming, but a personal favorite reaction was sparked from a guest student who is often isolated and friendless. The story stands out as the “Autism Speaks” puzzle and the beacon of light created for that artwork (see Figure 5). I asked the guest art student what he was able to contribute to the project. He showed me the one piece he created out of 24 pieces to the puzzle. He was so excited about his involvement even if it seemed minor to everyone else. Then the other kids simply shared that they wanted him to have the best part of the entire artwork. They labeled his work “Autism Speaks” so that it stood out the most and was the main emphasis (see Figure 5). To my students, this seemed to be the obvious, but to the adults watching and to the guest student it was life altering. Though no one really knows how life altering this experience truly was, watching that situation shows how amazing it is that students in high school can be compassionate with one another.



Figure 5. Autism Speaks Altered Puzzle artwork

Saving Babies

Several years back, I made a major change in my life. One that has made me the teacher I am today. I quit a very prominent career, on the spot. I had driven two and a half hours through bumper-to-bumper traffic to a lucrative but stressful and meaningless job in the magazine industry that was only twenty miles away. This was a job I had dreamed for many years earlier and had attained right out of college. But I had enough of the way things were in my life so I changed it. I needed purpose and meaning to be fulfilled. Tiffany, one of my sales representatives, would tell me to "lighten up; you are not saving babies here." She was right.

What she did not know was that I wanted to save babies, not literally, but I wanted to make an impression. That is exactly what I did. That long difficult drive and a job predicated on satisfying the never ending demands of difficult clients were never going to be a part of my life again. I could not believe it, but I left that magazine and all the glamour that went with it for a classroom full of teenagers.

The new career path I had taken was not at all where I had originally planned to ever end up. In retrospect, raised in a strict Christian culture, I felt as though I needed to work for passion and meaning. I knew that God wanted me to a particular direction to fulfill His plan, whatever that might be, and high school is where He put me. He knows of the students that need my skills and talents. Not that I am going to save the world, I am realistic, but I have something to give to the classroom.

Until now, I had no idea what that was. I have trained and worked towards “saving babies” for many years, though it took me a while to figure it out. Through artmaking I am able to share meaningful curriculum that teaches more than simply art. I can teach people about life and what comes with it. Compassion is just one of those significant topics that can impress on the life of just about anyone in my classroom. While not all of the students were receptive, I feel as though I successfully marked on the heart of many students and teachers.

Compassion is a life lesson and through the altered puzzle project I was able to share what I have learned all of these years. I have been prepared for more prepared with pain, suffering, tragedy, love, understanding, forgiveness, kindness, and even a bit of anger. These are all emotions that I have experienced and have overcome or developed a stronger awareness. I feel as though I am able to educate with meaning because of that. Not every child gets to share love or overcome tragedy. I am excited that I can share these emotions with my students and

teach them how to understand and develop them. I want them to be mature adults one day who can handle all aspects of life, not just skill and techniques with paint. All students need a fair shot at learning life skills in the classroom. I am just glad I am able to teach them compassion using artmaking.

Summary of Findings

Looking back over all of the research completed in my capstone study, I realized the powerful topic that I chose. I saw how behavior modeling was instrumental in student learning. I realized how my experiences were important to the classroom. The teachers and other adult observers were just as educated as the students were. The students showed each other what compassion meant by acting out the definition. The final artwork reflected teamwork and maturity. While not every student in the classroom developed a stronger sense of compassion through artmaking, it is realistic to say that two thirds of the classroom developed a stronger sense of compassion and caring towards others.

Discussion and Conclusion

My Compassion in Action curriculum brought selfless and selfish behaviors to the surface early on in the project process and distinctively separated those who did not want to participate or learn compassion. Though not every student in the classroom was exhibiting compassionate behaviors, many expressed to me that they were proud to participate. Realistically not all students are going to actively participate and cooperate with projects, more specifically projects involving positive emotions and behaviors. One never really knows how effective our lessons are on the hearts and minds of students, but through verbal discussions and visible reactions many students expressed a strong level of understanding compassion in this lesson. The goal was to influence compassionate behaviors, regardless of the number of students reached. To

be successful working with students of various communication and learning levels, it takes tolerance, patience, kindness, empathy, and caring. Those behaviors were naturally woven into the curriculum of the artmaking and effectively articulated by the participants. The next section discusses what my reaction and personal observations are to this project. I also give several examples of where this type of curriculum can be seen and shared.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

As the project concluded, my students began to share stories with the class or just myself about what the guest students did while working on the altered puzzle project and what they learned individually. They discussed their desire to savor the moment working with another person or give their guest the beacon light (shining moment) of the artwork. They shared how important the project was to their own artmaking. The students discovered that art is a way for people to communicate when typical communication is not possible. The students realized how meaningful artmaking could be if artists allow his or her own personal feelings to influence the process.

This project educated everyone involved including the students, teachers, and viewers who were able to experience even one day of the process. Rachel Kessler (2000) was a great model for how influential artmaking can be for everyone involved. I noticed that my students seemed to show more integrity and maturity when the guest students attended our art sessions. They would keep the room cleaner, materials more organized, and take more pride in the artwork in the room. My students showed an overall sense of personal growth due to adding compassionate behaviors in the art room. They conveyed these improvements by acting similarly and positively outside of the classroom even when no one was watching. Just as Stewart and Walker (2001) describe in *Rethinking Curriculum in Art*, students put learned behavior in action

through making connections (p. 13). Creating artwork in groups (see Figure 6) and performing positive actions allowed later connections to be made by the students. Overall, this project was positively influential for the majority of students in art room 1551 (See Figure 7).

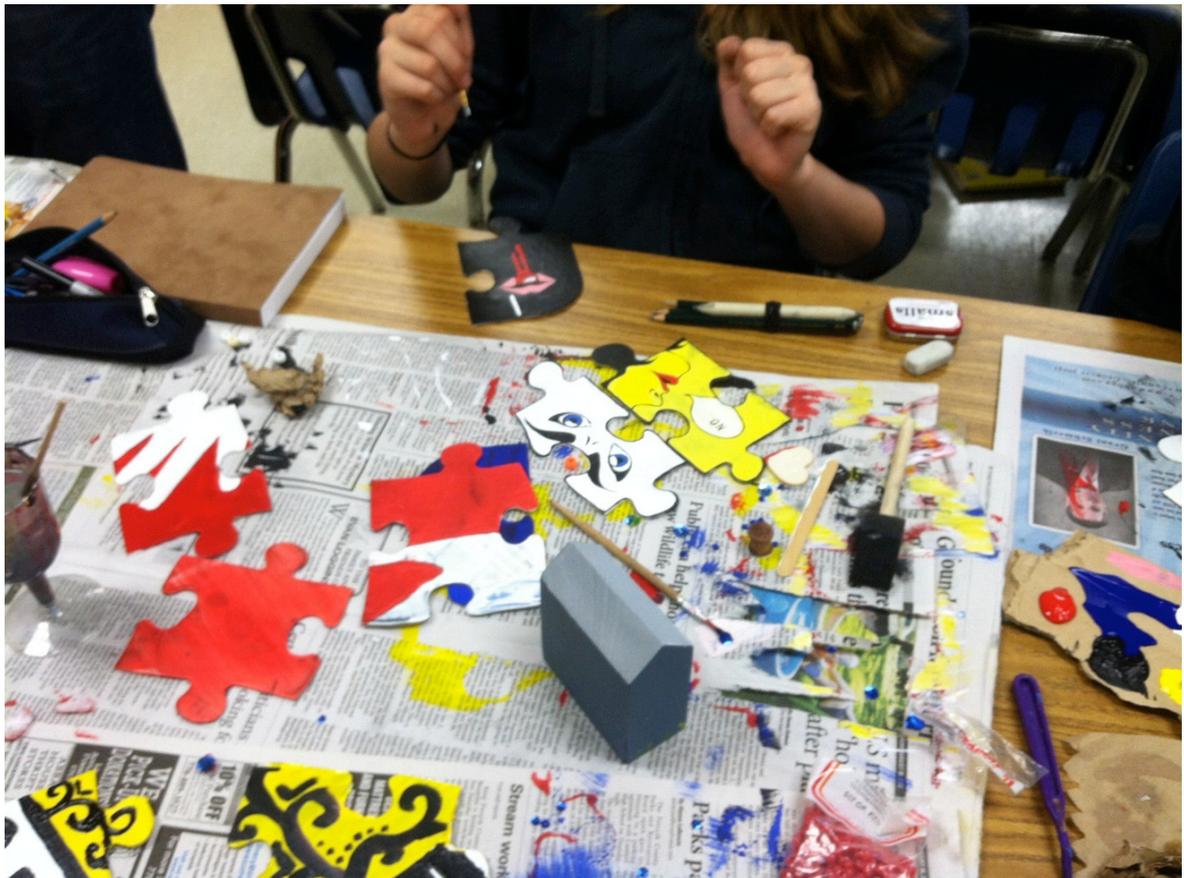


Figure 6. Altered Puzzle artmaking

When students are placed together in settings that create a safe environment to cultivate communication, compassion naturally forms. Other emotions and behaviors surface with this type of setting, but if art educators facilitate a variety of settings for positive growth the students will flourish effortlessly in their artmaking and character building skills. This process can and did work with students at all levels of ability and disability, verbal and nonverbal alike.

Communication is the key to emotional response; therefore why not explore all of the ways to communicate so that emotions are better understood? There are students in all schools who are unable to effectively communicate their feelings and ideas on only a verbal level. Their peers may not know how to relate to these students if they are not educated on how to understand or communicate with them. It seems obvious to use a variety of ways to reach nonverbal students and allow them to express themselves creatively. Artmaking would allow for that expression due to its emotional connection and personal dynamic. Sharing this key to inner self-exploration could open doors for classrooms of all shapes and sizes. It could decrease common cultural concerns such as bullying, facilitate behavior management, and promote educational success. Students in any classroom can learn how to be more compassionate with one another through artmaking. While this study will not fix all of the problems in my classroom, it may benefit students who need a better understanding of character development and social change.

Compassion is an emotion that can best be learned while in action, as seen in the findings.

This study, the artwork, capstone paper, and my website were a result of the research conducted during my higher education experience. The findings will benefit any high school art educator that wants to encourage and implement character development through artmaking using compassion in the classroom. The materials and research collected throughout this study are available on my website at <http://www.stephaniepickens.com/capstone-project.html>. Lesson

plans and PowerPoint presentations are also available on the website. I also created a Pinterest board (see Figure 8) (<http://pinterest.com/stepickens/compassion-thru-art/>) reflecting an ongoing development of materials around this topic.



Figure 8 Pinterest Board: Compassion Thru Art

Conclusion

Promoting social awareness and personal development is a primary goal in my classroom. Compassionate behavior developed through artmaking allowed my students to enjoy learning and properly express themselves while positively impacting the lives of others. Through this study, I have successfully learned how to implement this goal in art and I hope other educators can also. My future art classes will benefit from the purpose-driven curriculum I was

able to develop during my studies at the University of Florida. For more information about my work and classroom, visit stephaniepickens.com (see Figure 9).

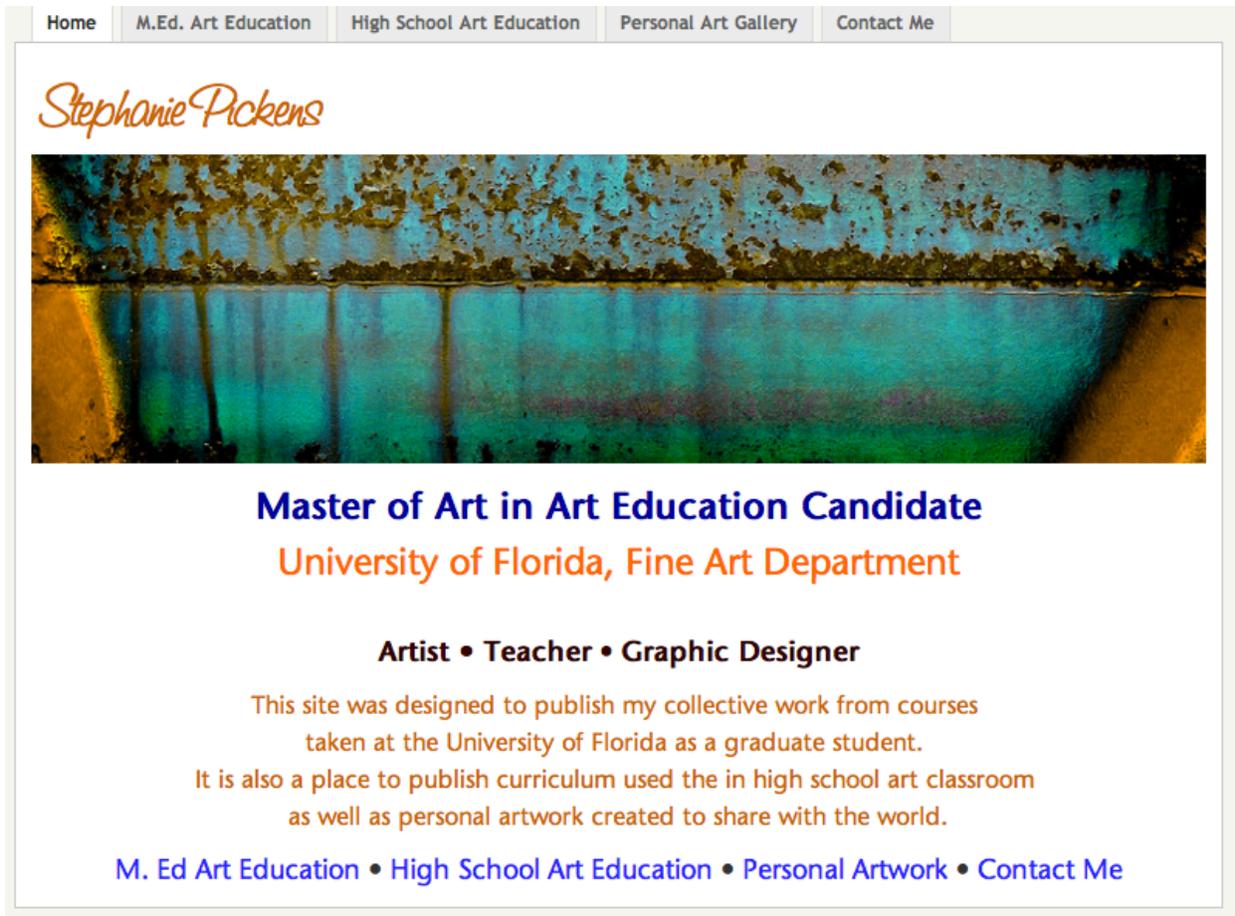


Figure 9. Stephaniepickens.com cover page

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Appendix A

Review Questions after completion of project

1. Do you feel that the altered puzzle project was successful? YES OR NO

In your opinion, elaborate why or why not.

2. What did you learn from working with the guest students during the puzzle project?
3. Do you think that lesson was effective in promoting compassion? Why or why not?
4. How can artmaking influence compassionate behavior?
5. How can compassionate behavior influence art making?

Appendix B

UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research Protocol Submission Form

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.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Title of Protocol: | Art with Purpose: Promoting Compassion through Art |
|---------------------------|---|

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Principal Investigator: | Stephanie Pickens | | UFID #: XXXXXXXX |
| Degree / Title: | Master of Art in Art Education | Mailing Address: (If on campus include PO Box address): XXXXXXXXXX | Email: XXXXXXXX |
| Department: | School of Art and Art History | | Telephone #: XXXXX |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|--|---------------|---------------|
| Co-Investigator(s): | | UFID#: | Email: |
|----------------------------|--|---------------|---------------|

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Supervisor (If PI is student): | XXXXXXXXXX | UFID#: | |
| Degree / Title: | PhD | Mailing Address: (If on campus include PO Box address): College of Fine Arts Office of the Dean XXXXXX | Email : XXXXXXX |
| Department: | School of Art and Art History | | Telephone #: XXXXX |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Date of Proposed Research: | Fall 2012 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|

| | |
|---|------|
| Source of Funding <i>(A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):</i> | none |
|---|------|

Scientific Purpose of the Study: To develop a curriculum and pedagogy promoting compassionate behaviors in the high school art classroom through a service learning project involving a collaboration with special needs students.

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

While teaching high school art, I will observe ways in which students exhibit compassionate behaviors towards peers through artmaking activities. I will evaluate what compassion looks like through behavior studies and observation. I will

observe peer teaching and group artmaking to determine if compassionate behaviors are exhibited. All participants will participate in the development of an art project around an issue or concern they, as a class, want to address. Each research participant will work through artmaking, discussions, peer teaching, critiques, and evaluations based on promoting compassionate behaviors towards others. Results may vary. Using compassion as an intrinsic motivator and art as a vehicle, I hope to see students develop stronger interpersonal skills, socially appropriate connections, and build character. As the only teacher in my district who is teaching this content and approach, my own classroom is best served for this research. Participants receive previous art education, daily connections to similar peer groups, and consistent behavioral development of this content.

Participatory Action Research methods will be used for this study. I will observe students as they are making art individually and peer-to-peer teaching fellow students. I will keep field notes that document these classroom observations. I will take pictures of the artwork produced in the project. I will have informal conversations about these projects with the students and I will keep field notes about these conversations. No students will be identified. No recognizable photographs of students will be taken. I will write up my findings in a capstone paper. Some of the photographs of the art projects will appear in this paper. This paper will be deposited in the University of Florida's digital repository in which masters theses and dissertations are housed. No students will be pressured or coerced to be participants in this study. All students will have the options to withdraw from the study even after the study is over. No student will be identified. Student participation as subjects in this research will be completely voluntary. No students will be pressured to be volunteers to be in this project and students will be treated the same as others not participating.

Describe Potential Benefits: increase intrinsic motivation and social development of my students; develop stronger cross curricular connections improving test scores, grades, and knowledge about other areas of study; create a compassionate group of students that make positive changes within the school as well as community and hopefully positively influence others not directly involved in art classes.

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 already be enrolled in my class

| | | | | | |
|---|----|-----------------------------------|-------|---|-----|
| Maximum Number of Participants (to be approached with consent) | 45 | Age Range of Participants: | 14-18 | Amount of Compensation/ course credit: | N/A |
|---|----|-----------------------------------|-------|---|-----|

Describe the Informed Consent Process. Students will be asked to volunteer. Students from my advanced art class will be asked to participate in this study.

See Attached

(SIGNATURE SECTION)

| | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| Principal Investigator(s) Signature: | | Date: 6.5.12 |
| Co-Investigator(s) Signature(s): | | Date: |
| Supervisor's Signature (if PI is a student): | | Date: |
| Department Chair Signature: | | Date: |

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Parents and Students

Protocol Title: Art with Purpose: Promoting Compassion through Art

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:

The purpose of this study is to examine the promotion of compassion through art education.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

All students will be given traditional art curriculum that involves compassionate actions such as a service-learning project partnering with other students or an art project that specifically benefits students in need. Students will be given the opportunity to provide feedback about the projects and teaching methodology, thereby helping to improve or develop the curriculum to its fullest potential. This program of study will involve group work, discussions, artmaking, critiques, evaluations, and written articles. The collection of activities is not any different than what students normally experience in their art courses, but could be more personal in nature if the student feels comfortable to share his or her opinion. The desired outcome of the revised art curriculum is for all students to develop a better understanding of what compassion in action means and the hope is that this personal attribute will develop and mature in each student.

Time required:

One class per day for one semester

Risks and Benefits:

There are no risks expected with this study. I hope to see your child benefit from this program

maturing in selfless behaviors showing compassion to others. I also hope that this study improves the transfer of compassionate behaviors from the classroom to the community.

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 completed and the data have been 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 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 even through the end of the year and after grades are final.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Attention Dr. XXXXX XXXXXX

School of Art and Art History

University of Florida

P.O. Box XXXXXXXX

Gainesville, Fl 32611-5801

(XXX) 392-XXXXXX

XXXXXX@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 you 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 or

Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

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Figure 2. Altered Puzzle artmaking

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Figure 5. Autism Speaks Altered Puzzle artwork

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Figure 7. Altered Puzzle artwork

Figure 8. Pinterest Board: Compassion Thru Art

Figure 9. Stephaniepickens.com cover page

Author Biography

The author of this paper is an art educator that has been in the field for eight consecutive years. She started out as an artist and art director at Atlanta Magazine as well as freelancer for several advertising agencies in the Atlanta area. Stephanie Pickens has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Valdosta State University (2003) and plans to graduate from The University of Florida with a Masters of Art in Art Education in the Fall of 2012. She regularly attends professional development conferences around the U. S. and teaches an adult art course in her region. Mrs. Pickens plans to continue her teaching career in high school art education through retirement. She lives in Georgia with her husband and daughter who expects to also become an artist one day herself.