

INCORPORATING CONTEMPORARY POTTERY APPROACHES INTO A HIGH SCHOOL
CERAMICS COURSE

By

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
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Abstract

This research project involved introducing contemporary ceramics to students in a level two public high school ceramics/pottery class. A lesson plan was developed and implemented in which students examined how pottery progressed through history along with specific contemporary potters whose technical and conceptual accomplishments influenced the pottery world. Students were given the opportunity to develop a list of current environmental, social and cultural issues relate to their lives and to consider creating a contemporary ceramic artwork that expressed their voices around an issue. Through research on each of their topics, a brief written synopsis, and a series of sketches, students developed their ceramic artworks. Students were encouraged to develop their voices through their contemporary pottery piece. Action research was used and photographs, a personal reflective journal, several pre and post project reflections, and interviews were collected and analyzed. A final exhibition was held where the public was given an opportunity to see the artwork and talk with students. A survey was used at the exhibition in order to document and analyze the impact of the artwork on the students and audience.

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Ceramics has existed since people discovered the ability to take clay, form it into a vessel or sculpture, add color, and fire it to make it permanent. Contemporary pottery is marked by characteristics of the material and ideas of the period in which it is created. Today potters are creating and developing new techniques along with traditional methods to create aesthetically compelling visual statements in response to present day culture.

Ceramic artists rely on their individual skills and dedicate their time and energy to master a variety of techniques and materials. However, they also include concepts in the making of their work. Contemporary ceramic artworks often accommodate ceramic traditions, cultures, and history as well as the influence of contemporary art avant-garde. Traditionally, pottery has been viewed as an art form made to serve a function. However, today's potters are creating pieces where the form of traditional pottery is being rethought as an art form serving more than just functionality. Contemporary potters are developing new clay techniques, which combined with traditional methods create an aesthetically compelling visual statement in response to present day culture. Their ceramic artwork often juxtaposes ancient ceramic techniques with modern symbols and imagery or provides insight into political, cultural, and environmental issues from around the world. Contemporary pottery has an exciting appeal to it because potters are pushing the limits and possibilities in how clay can be used to capture themes about the world through their eyes.

Many contemporary potters derive inspiration for their work from an array of social, cultural, and environmental issues as seen in Tammie Rubin's work, "Messages" (O'Donnell, 2012). In Rubin's "Messages" large clay forms depict a variety of communication devices leaving the viewer somewhat confused as her hybrid forms speaking in a coded language. Expecting to hear sound, the viewer is left with silence. Rubin sends a message of how

communication in our world can be a visual transmission through metaphoric mechanisms. The shift in contemporary pottery away from functionality is not without criticism, however, as observed by Hluch (2001), "There are some who would trim the role of function from utilitarian pottery to acquire enhanced respect or prestige that currently exists in the fine art culture for non-utilitarian art objects. But this diminishes the distinct and valuable service pottery performs and obfuscates its original historical role in societies." (p. 11) My research does not aim to lessen the role of function from utilitarian pottery or to acquire enhanced respect or prestige for it, but is interested in conjoining how levels I and II high school ceramics and I might engage contemporary issues through a ceramic voice.

For my capstone research project, the lesson plan identified artists and approaches to contemporary ceramics and examined some different techniques that today's potters use. Action research method was used to make visible the process of classroom transformation and to show how contemporary ceramics could be used as a vehicle for contemporary dialogues about our world. Action research was also used to study a unit of the curriculum I created and taught over a ten week period in which students created a contemporary piece of pottery that spoke to their issue. Through this process, the hope was to use ceramics as a way for students to gain a greater understanding of themselves, their world, and how their art could be used to make a personal statement about their world.

Statement of the Problem

I believed students in a contemporary high school studio pottery class needed to be exposed to techniques, concepts, skills, and ideas in order to develop a voice for contemporary issues. The problem is how do we afford the time, and what techniques can be used to engage students in exploring contemporary issues with ceramic arts.

Purpose or Goals of the Study

The purpose of my research was to explore how my students in Ceramics/Pottery II class created and developed a contemporary piece of pottery they conceptualized in response to researching a current issue that affected them and their world. In addition, the use of action research was a way to creatively, and critically reflect on a method to document and record classroom practice. Action research enabled me to study how my students became familiar with contemporary ceramic forms using different types of techniques and materials often used by contemporary potters. Another goal was to consider how my students and the community might begin to understand how ceramic arts could be used to make a statement and develop a voice for reflecting on social, cultural, or environmental issues in our lives.

Research Questions

To explore the use of ideas and themes in a high school ceramics art class my main research question was:

- How can high school art students engage contemporary ceramics and issues in their ceramic artwork?

Additional questions considered throughout this research were:

- How can high school students bridge the gap between traditional/historical and contemporary pottery?
- In what ways do high school students make a connection with social, cultural, or environmental issues that affect them through the study of contemporary pottery?
- What kinds of pottery do students in high school in a contemporary pottery class create in order to show how their world and issues affecting them might be conveyed through this art form?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

The rationale for this study was to identify strategies to help students look at their world closely and find out more about how they can use themes and current issues to develop a voice through ceramic art. I believe if the students are able to make a connection with a current issue that affects them and create a piece of contemporary pottery that speaks to the issue, the students will hopefully develop a voice that speaks loud and clear for those who view their art piece. This study is significant in that the research project engages students and the community in communicating current issues through art.

Assumptions

Through the study of contemporary pottery and the creation of personally meaningful ceramic forms, I assumed that students would be interested in understanding their world and how issues affect them and their peers. I assumed that students would be able to convey their thoughts and feelings into a contemporary pottery piece. I assumed that when the completed ceramic artworks viewed by the public in an exhibition, the artwork would stimulate conversations around the issues students explored.

Definition of Terms

Traditional pottery are objects which has been formed by hand, painted with natural pigments, and fired with an organic fuel (Mackey, 2003, p. 26).

Contemporary means marked by the characteristics of the present period; happening, existing, living, or coming into being during the same period of time (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Pottery are articles, vessels, etc. made from earthenware and baked in a kiln (Collins, 2012).

Ceramics are objects made from clay that permanently retain their shape after they have been heated to specific temperatures (Mackey, 2013, p. 190). Also defined as: of or relating

to the manufacture of any product (as earthenware, porcelain, or brick) made essentially from a nonmetallic mineral (as clay) by firing at a high temperature (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

In using action research, the amount of time to do the study played a major role in the study (May, 1993; Stout, 2006). The study was conducted over a course of ten weeks due to different stages of making a clay piece. For example, once the students finished their clay piece, the amount of time it took to dry completely varied from one to three weeks. Once the clay pieces were dry, the clay pieces were bisque fired in a kiln to 1945° F. Upon completion of the firing and cooling of the kiln, the clay pieces were returned to the students to be glazed or painted. Glazed pieces went through a second firing in order to complete the piece at 1828°F.

Literature Review

Contemporary pottery (ceramics), created by twentieth century potters, has an appeal and a uniqueness of its own that sets it apart from traditional pottery. Contemporary is defined by *Webster's New World Dictionary* as "living or happening in the same period of time; of about the same age; and of or in the style of the present of recent times; modern" (1994, p. 300). In her book, *Art History*, Stokstad clarifies several terms, ". . . 'pottery' and 'ceramics' may be used interchangeably - and the two often are" (2008, p. 20). She goes on to explain that the word ceramics "covers all baked-clay wares" whereas pottery "includes all baked-clay wares except porcelain" (2008). It was not until the nineteenth century the word *ceramics* began being used (Stokstad, 2005).

In order to get a clearer understanding of what contemporary pottery is or is not, one must look at the history of pottery. In her book, *Experience Clay*, Mackey observes, "Of all the arts, ceramics has perhaps the longest history, dating back to when people learned to control fire"

(2003, p. 5). In looking at ceramic timelines, one can gain an appreciation of how humans from all over the world have invented and utilized various types of clay bodies, firing methods, and decorative techniques in order to create a variety of pottery used to serve many functions. These functions have ranged from simple drinking cups to grain storage containers, from beautifully designed teapots to ornamental burial urns and effigy jars. The potter's role in societies around the world has been to satisfy "the never-ending need for useful objects" as observed by Hluch in his book, *The Art of Contemporary American Pottery* (2001, p. 25).

Pottery's Beginning

If one looks at the historical aspects of pottery making in various parts of the world, the many forms pottery has taken are somewhat phenomenal. Mackey (2003) discusses how the idea of taking clay from the ground and mixing it with water to create a substance with a plasticity allowing humankind to shape and mold it into a beautiful vessel was rather ingenious. Historians and archeologists who have studied shards of pottery have discovered an abundance of information about cultures and societies all over the world. Since pottery disintegrates very slowly, "pottery fragments . . . serve as a major key in dating sites and reconstructing human living and trading patterns" (Stokstad, 2008, p. 20). Historians note the importance of pottery to societies throughout time repeatedly. In his article, "The Importance of Pottery in Human Development," Petty (2010) indicates how pottery was an important aspect of Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. He comments on how their usage "of geometric designs and images to depict stories and events" was placed on pottery items, indicating how important the role of pottery was to these societies. As Greek potters continued to produce their beautifully decorated vessels potters in other parts of the world were creating pottery for their own culture.

Developments in Pottery

With the establishment of major trade routes across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas pottery became an important commodity used for trading. This also allowed for the sharing of information and items such as glazing techniques and pottery created by diverse cultures (Mackey, 1996). With the expansion of the Roman Empire, a number of technological innovations developed in Northern Europe. Mackey states in her timeline, "They introduced the potter's wheel, produced relief-decorated ware from molds, and developed large, parallel flue kilns. Workshops were turned into factories as great quantities of pottery were mass-produced for their growing cities and large armies" (1996).

Chinese invented porcelain over 1000 years ago and the Europeans began using it 300 years ago. Between 1400 and 1900 potters around the world were developing new kinds of glazing techniques and firing methods. For example, the Japanese learned to Raku fire while German potters were throwing salt into the kilns to achieve a strong, hard glaze on their high-fired stoneware. French potters had learned the technique of tin glazing from Italian potters creating their own style known as Faience. Dutch potters were creating strong, hard surfaces on their wares by adding a second firing with a lead glaze.

Impacts and Movements in the Pottery World

The pottery world has gone through many changes and continues yet today. One of the major impacts on the pottery world was the Industrial Revolution. The inexpensive, mass produced pottery took the place of the handmade pottery forcing some potters to stop producing their work only to take a job in the pottery factories. Potteries known as Stoke on Trent, North Staffordshire in England became a very prominent production center by 1800. With the introduction of Plaster of Paris, slip casting, and the string throwing wheel, the individuality of

pottery making was practically lost, therefore causing the culture that was once captured in clay to start to dwindle and fade (Stoke Museums, 2012).

“The Arts and Crafts Movement began as a reaction to social and economic anxiety after nearly a century of intense industrial modernization” (*Ceramics Today*, 2006, “The Arts & Crafts Movement,” ¶ 3). It thrived for more than seventy years. Another movement that impacted the pottery world was the Modern Movement. This movement began around 1900 and lasted for forty years. Walter Gropius, a pioneer of modern design, taught the dictum that form follows function at the Bauhaus in Germany (Mackey, 1996). Through his teachings, many ceramic factories in Germany set up studios for their designers in response to the Bauhaus precept. Other men who had a major impact on the pottery world were Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada. Leach, a British potter, "pushed for the revival of clay as a handcraft in the 1940's and 1950's through the Studio Potter Movement" (Mackey, 2003, p. 169). Hamada, a Japanese potter, traveled around the world with Leach teaching fundamental principles of clay design. While touring in the United States in 1952, they met Peter Voulkos, a functional potter and teacher (Mackey, 2003) who also became part of the movement to establish ceramics as a craft. In 1953 after meeting artists involved in the Avant-garde and Abstract Expressionist movement, Voulkos spent the next decades "pushing the boundaries of functional clay beyond handcraft to art and setting the tone for a whole new generation of mid-to late twentieth- century clay artists" (Mackey, 2003, p. 169). Voulkos succeeded in blurring the lines between craft and art. "As a result, a whole new concept-ceramic art-came into being. A clay object could now be valued solely for its sensory and aesthetic properties" (Mackey, 2003, p.169).

Women have also played a major role in the making of pottery. In *Women's Contribution to the Ceramic Field*, Jayne Shatz (2008) observes that women worked as potters in ancient

times "producing high quality ceramic work" over 25,000 years ago (¶ 3). With the invention of the potter's wheel, men took over the production of pottery, which slowly evolved into a mass production business. By the start of the 19th century, women began to re-emerge onto the ceramic scene becoming leaders in applying the Arts and Crafts principles to social reform. Wanting to represent and contribute their ideas, women began working in art potteries, schools, private studios, and industry making their mark in the ceramic field.

In the article, *Examining the First Women Potters in America and their Influence on Contemporary Ceramic Art*, Mark states, "During the early 1900's, women in America were becoming artists, teachers, business owners" (2007, p. 71). His research involved twelve women potters whose professional and artistic developments and achievements had a major impact on American pottery in the twentieth century, on each other, and future generations of ceramic artists. Two women potters whose professional and artistic developments and achievements that impacted the pottery world were Louise McLaughlin and Adelaide Alsop Robineau.

21st Century Contemporary Potters

Contemporary potters continue to explore new and inventive ways of combining traditional methods and modern day ideas into an array of intriguing and compelling pieces of artwork. "While three-dimensional form arises almost magically from the potter's hand, the dynamic range of surface possibilities offer further enchantments" (Hluch, 2001, p. 87). Potters and ceramicists are taking the basic form and putting a new twist on it, creating not only something that can be functional but also aesthetically appealing. "The contemporary potter is compelled to become expert in all phases of pottery production. This requires a tremendous amount of discipline and time" (Hluch, 2001, p. 27). Contemporary potter, Mark Hewitt states,

I am a maker of mugs, pitchers, and plates, among other things. I do not want to

make non-functional pots; I tried it once and I did not like it, neither the process nor the outcome . I am neither a ceramic artist nor a sculptor: I am a potter and I am proud. My pots are expressions of my individuality; they illuminate the world; they rage against it; they fascinate me with myriad details. My reasons for making pots are complicated and keep changing, but make them I do, and make them I will. My soul is at stake each time I squeeze eloquence out of dirt. (2007, ¶ 1)

In his article, Hewitt discusses how the world of ceramics has been divided in ways such as arts and crafts, functional pottery and ceramic sculpture, the academy and the marketplace as well as Imperial ceramics and folk ceramics, yet the connecting element is quality. According to Hewitt, this is what all potters and ceramic artists work toward and what good pottery criticism encourages (2007).

Contemporary potters such as Katie McBride and Linda Lighton create pieces with a sculptural flair and delicacy. Influenced by the work of the ceramists from the Precious Potteries, McBride's pieces incorporate a Rococo style and "employ the feel and lustre of that period" (2012, p. 54). McBride states, "I employ a lot of techniques that the Precious Potteries used for their pieces, which I then give a modern twist" (2012, p. 54). Compared to works of the past, she goes on to say, "I deliberately don't over-finish in order to maintain a spontaneity in my work" (p. 54). Her pieces have a delightful yet mischievous and playful look to them. Even though her pieces are functional the sculptures she adds to the form give it a quality of fine art.

"Linda Lighton builds energetic sculpture that is at once floral and figurative" (Polansky, 2011, p. 24). Her pieces of porcelain are delicate with a rhythmic flow. Polansky goes on to state, "The flowers that she creates take on dynamic female qualities. The pieces activate the air

around the sculpture and have lively sense of movement” (2011, p. 24). Lighton’s flora sculptures have a feel that mesmerizes the viewer.

Whether incorporating traditional methods or developing new styles, combining functional form with sculptural tendencies or using technology to give their work a different edge, or even just creating a coffee cup, potters have the ability to embrace their world with beauty and/or functionality permanently leaving a bit of their soul in every piece they create.

I have not even scratched the surface of the variety of artwork being produced by contemporary potters and ceramicists. For many contemporary potters, the idea of utilizing traditional methods in new and inventive ways gives substance and validity to their work. Incorporating their world as they see and experience it allows them to embed themselves in their work in order to give the viewer an emotional experience of looking at their world through a different set of eyes. Examples of contemporary pottery/ceramics can be found in books such as: *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramic: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection* by Garth Clark and Cindi Strauss; *Confrontational Ceramics* by Judith S. Schwartz; *Contemporary Ceramic Techniques* by John W. Conrad; and *The Encyclopedia of Pottery Techniques: A Comprehensive Visual Guide to Traditional and Contemporary Techniques* by Peter Cosentino. Journals such as *Ceramics Monthly*; *Ceramic Review*; *Ceramics Today*; and *Ceramics Art and Perception* are additional resource information about contemporary ceramics.

Methodology

Action research (Lewin, 1944; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) was used to study students in a high school Ceramics/Pottery II class where curriculum was designed to introduce students to contemporary pottery techniques.

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of those practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out... The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, pp. 5-6)

Using action research method, I used a spiral of steps to plan, document, and reflect on what happened as students created a piece of contemporary pottery developed from their research of the current issue they had selected and sketches they created reflecting this information. Action research allows the researcher/educator to improve on their practices through reflection thus gaining a better understanding of their practices in order to enhance student learning (May, 1993; Stout, 2006). Through action research, documentation of the process of students engaged in working with the clay to creating their contemporary piece involved photographing students, class discussions and critiques, student interviews, and student surveys.

Subjects

The subjects in my research were high school students of various ages ranging from tenth to twelfth grade. Students were from different ethnic backgrounds consisting of Caucasian, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic. The study took place in a level two Ceramics/Pottery class with a population of 20 students consisting of three males and seventeen females. The research was voluntary with UF Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A) to protect the participants. Students were offered an opportunity to volunteer to participate in the

research. Participation or non-participation in this study did not have an effect on the student's grade; however students were required to complete all class assignments as they were graded.

Research Site

Upon approval of the UF IRB, school district approval and administrative approval, the study took place in a public high school pottery classroom in an urban community in Florida with a student population of 1,697. The school is located in a major military town where there is a strong military influence. The area is situated along the Gulf Coast where many retirees move to and become volunteers in the schools.

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Through action research, teaching strategies could be enhanced as well as improve student learning in the classroom. Teachers can investigate, reflect, and improve on their own teaching methods by becoming researchers. Collection of data can help the teacher develop strategies in order to promote student learning as well as enhance understanding (May, 1993; Stout, 2006). With the completion of the IRB's, parent and student permission forms, approval from the school district and the school administrator's permission data was collected for this study. I collected data through the following artifacts and process: interviewing each student; direct conversations with students; daily journaling; student project sketchbooks and reflections; daily observation of the process as students engaged in creating their contemporary piece; photographing the process over a period of eleven weeks; student survey; artist statement; exhibition; and audience survey.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was analyzed and classified into categories to show how students made connections between their research and their contemporary pottery piece. Data analysis was ongoing

throughout the research. Daily conversation with the students was vital in helping students to reflect and evaluate their contemporary piece in order to make needed changes or develop a solution to a problem. By keeping a daily journal, I was able to reflect on my teaching skills as well as the students' creative process. Upon completion of the contemporary clay pieces, an exhibition was held where students and the audience could dialogue about these current issues, the effects on society, and how the student's contemporary piece reflected this issue.

Limitations

The limitations of this research was a combination of limited access to information and resources for student research, the short amount of time the study was conducted over a period of eleven weeks, and only having two days to exhibit the students work in a public gallery. Because the research took place in a real world public high school studio art classroom using action research unforeseen issues and a level of unpredictability occurred. Students were limited to accessibility to technology for research because the media center was closed for testing and there was only one student computer in the classroom. Drying time of the clay pieces was crucial to avoid possible breakages because of the limited time to complete the clay piece. Another limitation was only having two days to exhibit the contemporary pieces for the audience to view the show.

Findings

The main purpose of my study was to observe my high school students engaged in using contemporary pottery techniques to create a contemporary ceramic piece with voice of a current issue. My main research question through the study was: How can high school art students engage contemporary ceramics and issues in ceramic artwork? The following three sub-questions also informed my research. How can high school students bridge the gap between

traditional/historical and contemporary pottery? In what ways do high school students make a connection with social, cultural, or environmental issue that affect them through the study of contemporary pottery? Finally, What kinds of pottery do high school students in contemporary pottery class create in order to show how their world and issues affecting them might be conveyed through ceramic art form? In the following section, I will explain some of my findings I discovered in conducting this research share some implications and reflect on future projects that resulted from this research.

Students were shown a variety of contemporary pottery to illustrate how contemporary pottery could speak with voice. I observed students as they discussed and created a list of current issues they felt strongly about and then sub-divided the issues into three categories. Student's research of the issues selected showed many of the students had feelings about the same issues. One issue that seemed to have an impact overall was keeping the water and the beaches free of pollution. The students were very concerned with their environment. However, students were very vocal in picking an issue that other students had not selected. The student interviews I conducted showed that students felt strongly about the issue they had selected and for some it involved personal experience. Sketches created by the students illustrated their idea of the issue in a variety of ways. As students began the process of creating their contemporary piece out of clay, photographing students to document the process helped the students to reflect on their skills and techniques as their piece developed.

First Discovery: High school students aware of current issues in their world

Students were given the task of developing a list of current issues in a brainstorming session during class. Students spent two days working together in groups to create a list of current issues. Students then sub-divided the issues into social, cultural, and environmental

issues. (See Figure 1) Many of the issues were controversial and polarizing, for example, abortion, racial profiling, sexual orientation, gun control and terrorism. It was very educational to listen and observe the students as they discussed issues relevant to their lives, as well as how they defended their views on their issues.

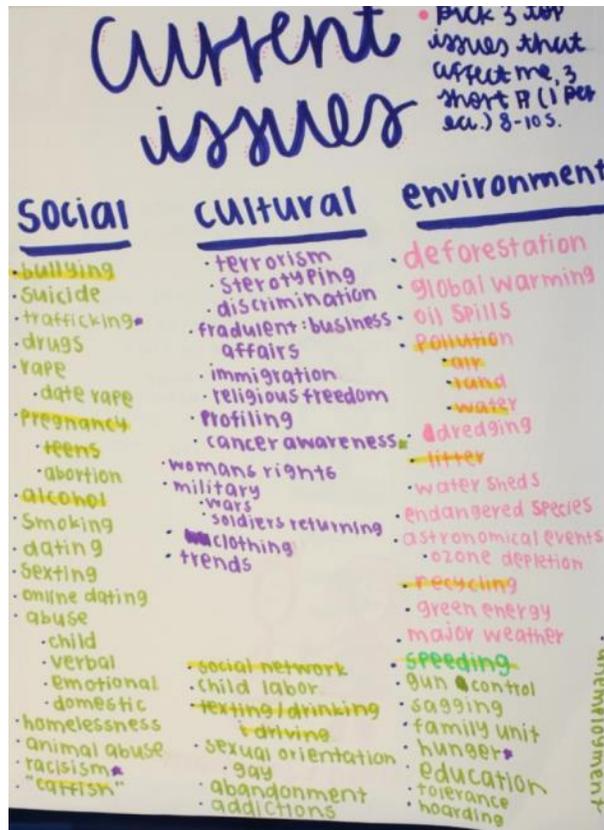


Figure 1. A student's list of current issues gathered by the class.

Once students completed their research, I interviewed each student individually in order to understand the reason for the student's selection and their concept for creating their contemporary ceramic piece. It was surprising to discover how many of the students had personally been affected by the issue they had chosen to explore in their art. Some of the students' comments from the interviews were as follows:

"The reason I chose cancer awareness is because my mother and father are cancer survivors and one of my grandparents died from cancer." (Reflection response, Kory F., April, 2013)

"I am choosing to do my contemporary piece about teenage suicide because two relatives in my family committed suicide, one just this year." (Reflection response, Meagan H., April, 2013)

"I want to do my contemporary piece on how people discriminate against and judge people unfairly because of the music they listen to. People judge me because of the music I listen to and it isn't fair. I am not a bad person because of the music I listen to." (Reflection response, Courtney B., April, 2013)

"As a victim of sexual abuse, I want to make people aware of how this issue is kept quiet and many times overlooked. Victims need to speak out." (Reflection response, Caitlin S., April, 2013)

The students' reflections helped me to gain an understanding of how the student sees their world and how these issues affected them, whether directly or indirectly.

Second Discovery: Students were sympathetic and helpful to each other during the creative/production process.

After students had selected the issue to explore for their contemporary piece and completed the research, the next phase involved developing their concept through a series of sketches. (See Figure 2) Students engaged in class discussions and critiques of the sketches in order to give each other feedback and ideas to help one another. (See Figure 3)

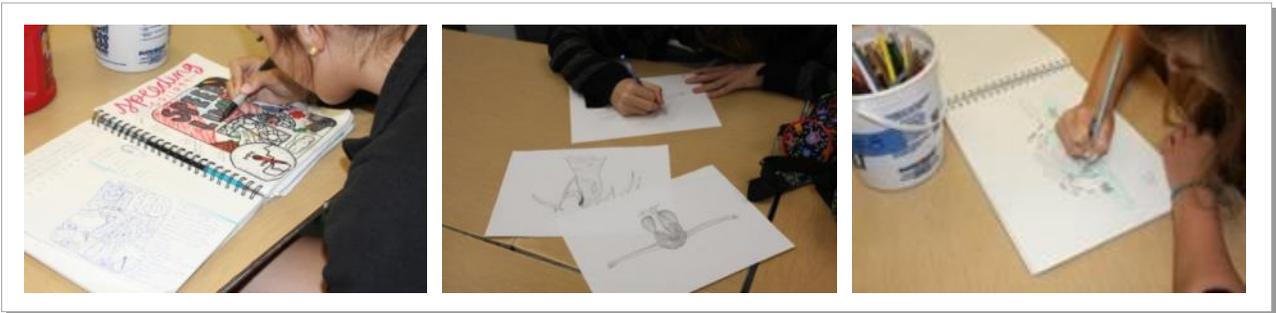


Figure 2. Students developing their concept for the issue they selected through sketching their ideas.



Figure 3. Students engaged in conversation about the issues and the sketches they have created.

Once the students began working with the clay in creating their piece, I observed several times students engaging in conversation about their clay piece. On occasion, I noted how students became aware of their peers having difficulty with an area of their piece, even to the point of starting over. Students would offer suggestions or help to the student and many times encouraged their fellow students to not give up. (See Figures 4 and 5) It was interesting to watch how the class became a large working cooperative unit, not just individuals.



Figure 4. Student (left) engaged in conversation with the student (right) about her contemporary piece.



Figure 5. Student helping another student with glazing.

Third Discovery: Students were able to successfully express current issues and develop voice through their contemporary ceramic artwork.

After eleven weeks students completed their contemporary ceramic piece. All the contemporary pieces were exhibited at the *Arts and Design Society Gallery* for two days for public viewing. The art exhibition was juried by two art teachers from Okaloosa County. Judges were asked to judge based on how well the piece had voice in addressing the issue the student had researched. Judges were also asked to consider the pieces on the content, quality, and technique used to create the piece. Having the show juried was outside the context of my

research but it allowed students the opportunity of having their work viewed in a competitive/professional setting. In the art field, many exhibitions require the artists' work to be juried before the art can be exhibited. During the exhibition, the audience also juried the student artwork. The audience participated in selecting a piece for the "People's Choice" award. The contemporary piece selected (see Figure 6) addressed the issue of teenage suicide, titled *Choice of Life*.



Figure 6. Student's contemporary piece on teenage suicide, titled *Choice of Life* was selected by the audience for the People's Choice Award.

Fourth Discovery: The art exhibition provided a platform for the students and the community to dialogue about art and current issues.

The exhibition took place over a two-day period. Students' contemporary pieces were exhibited throughout the gallery where the audience could view the pieces. (See Appendix B). Students and members of the audience participated in dialogues about the artwork. Students were complemented on the quality of their artwork and how well they had communicated their ideas.

In addition, members of the audience also responded to the students' contemporary pieces through an audience survey consisting of four questions. Using ceramics as a vehicle to express current issues, 98% of the audience felt the students expressed and were clear in their interpretation of the issue they had chosen. This addressed Questions 1 and 2. The audience was asked to select the piece they felt had the strongest voice in conveying the issue the student explored to create their contemporary piece. The surveys revealed 26% of the audience selected *Choice of Life*, 10% selected *Lookout!* with 9% selecting each, *The Choice?*, *Silently Spoken*, and *Color Blind* (see Appendix B). The last question asked the audience to select the piece that spoke directly to them. 16% of the audience selected *Choice of Life*. This question brought an array of comments from the audience with many who had faced this issue themselves or a loved one. Other pieces selected were *Silently Spoken* with 12%, *The Choice?* with 10%, *Color Blind* and *Never Let Go*, each with 9%. Some of the audience comments to the contemporary pieces were as follows:

"Teenage suicide is more common than realized." (Audience survey, June, 2013)

"*Choice of Life* spoke to me because not only teens and young adults deal with this issue but also persons of all ages and stages of life. Personal experiences with issue as a health care provider." (Audience survey, June, 2013)

"I volunteer at a pregnancy help center. I see many young pregnant women and no men 'manning up'. Bring back Fatherhood!" (Audience survey, June, 2013)

"My concerns for young women who have lost the good thoughts of their own body and life." (Audience survey, June, 2013)

"Children are unable to help themselves. Their powerlessness is demonstrated by the 'tape over the mouth in the head figure. Both *Silently Spoken* and *Lookout!* convey the

plight of these children. Why is there abuse? What de-sensitizes the kind spirit? Why would another human enslave another ore abuse another?" (Audience survey, June, 2013)

Many members of the audience were visibly moved by the students' artwork and many of the students experienced seeing how their contemporary piece spoke to the audience. I was surprised when a ceramics colleague of mine who teaches at a local college commented on the value of the artist statement, which was printed in the program. He was impressed with what the students had accomplished and commented on how college students struggle with knowing why they create their art. He felt this was a vital step in the creation of artwork. (Journal reflection, K. Moran, 2013)

This research has given me great insight into using contemporary pottery approaches in a high school ceramics class. Students gained a greater understanding of how ceramics as an art form could be used to engage the public as well as themselves through issues affecting society. Student learning was enhanced as they became engaged in making connections with their world through creating a piece of contemporary pottery with voice. They experienced how their art could speak to members of the audience about issues in their world. In the next section, I will share my implications and future endeavors.

Implications and Recommendations

As a reflective practitioner, action research was a good methodology for my research study. It brought new insights to my teaching methods by helping me to capture and evaluate my methods and to modify them in order to promote student learning and achievement.

It is interesting to note that the lesson had the benefit of being therapeutic for many students. Students were able to express some of the emotional trauma they had carried inside themselves by researching, designing, and creating their contemporary ceramic pieces.

According to the audience survey, the artwork made a deep impression on the audience. Many members of the audience made a personal connection with a particular piece that spoke directly to them due to their past with that topic. This allowed the students and the audience to connect and dialogue about the issues. Students advance experience with ceramics and their age further facilitate conversation with the audience at the exhibition.

Art educators can use this research to help students in a ceramics studio class become engaged in issues in their world. By utilizing contemporary ceramics as a vehicle, art educators can help students become aware of techniques and materials used in creating a contemporary piece. Contemporary ceramic techniques can help students develop voice in creating their clay pieces and through this art form can help students make a connection with the audience through dialogue as well as evoking a reaction.

In looking ahead, future endeavors include incorporating contemporary pottery approaches into future Ceramics/Pottery II, III and Sculpture I classes. I also plan to continue to use action research informally in continuing to improve my teaching practices. As a goal I plan to create summer workshops for art teachers in my school district to share this research in using contemporary pottery approaches in the classroom.

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Appendix A

IRB Research Permission Letters.

UF Institutional Review Board
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

PO Box 112250
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250
352-392-0433 (Phone)
352-392-9234 (Fax)
irb2@ufl.edu

March 14, 2013

TO: Kimberly D. Moran
210 Baker Avenue
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair *ISF*
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol #2013-U-0182

TITLE: Incorporating Contemporary Pottery Approaches into a High School Ceramics Course

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Your protocol was approved as an expedited study under category 7: *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.* Given your protocol, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from the parent or legal guardian of each participant. When it is feasible, you should obtain signatures from both parents. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research.

It is essential that the parents/guardians of your minor participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, ***including the need to increase the number of participants authorized***, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

This approval is valid through **March 5, 2014**. If you have not completed the study prior to this date, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. **Additionally, should you complete the study on or before the expiration date, please submit the study closure report to our office.** The form can be located at http://ib.ufl.edu/irb02/Continuing_Review.html. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl



College of Fine Art
School of Art and Art History

PO Box 115801
Gainesville, Florida 32611-5801
352-392-9977
352-392-8453 Fax

March 2013

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student with the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Florida. As part of my coursework I am conducting research on introducing contemporary pottery to the Ceramics/Pottery II class where students will create a contemporary piece of pottery that speaks to a current environmental, social, or cultural issue. The purpose of this study is to examine how students become familiar with and utilize contemporary pottery forms and the different types of techniques and materials that contemporary potters use. I want the students to understand how this art form can be used to make a statement in reflecting a social, cultural, or environmental issue that affects them. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

Students will be introduced to the history of pottery and how it has evolved as an art form in different parts of the world over time. Students participating in the research will be asked to research a current environmental, cultural, or social issue that affects their world. Students will view several contemporary pottery pieces reflects their world. Students will develop several sketches of their ideas from their research in order to create a contemporary piece of pottery. During the study students will be photographed using a digital camera to show the different stages of creating their contemporary pottery piece. To protect students' identities only first names will be used. Once the research is complete the photographs will be stored for 7 years on a portable hard drive, after that time they will be destroyed.

Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect the student's grades. This research is for educational purposed only and will be shared through professional presentations and educational publication. You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation in the study at any time, even after the course has ended, without consequence. However, students are required to complete the class assignments as they will be graded. There are no known risks. Students will benefit as being contributors to contemporary art curriculum development and from the opportunity to exhibit their art in an art exhibition. No compensation is offered for participation. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at 833-3300, ext. 1502 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Michelle Tillander at 352.392.9977 or mtilland@ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352)392-0433.

Kim Moran

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child,

_____ (print named), to participate in Kim Moran's study of incorporating contemporary pottery approaches into a high school ceramics course.

Parent signature _____ Date _____

The Foundation for the Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution

Approved by
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02
Protocol # 2013-U-0182
For Use Through 03/05/2014

Student Permission

Project Title: Incorporating Contemporary Pottery Approaches into a High School Ceramics Course

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to examine how students in a Ceramics/Pottery II class become familiar with and utilize contemporary pottery forms and the different types of techniques and materials that contemporary potters use.

What you will be asked to do in the study: This study is part of the regular ceramic art class. I am asking to use your ceramic art projects as part of my research about ceramics in a high school program. I am asking for permissions to document your work through photographs, class observations, and a final interview and include as part of the results of my research on ceramics in a high school program.

In ceramics class you will be introduced to contemporary potters and the types of techniques and materials they use in creating their pottery. You will be asked to research a current environmental, social, or cultural issue and write a short essay. After completing the essay, you will develop sketches of a contemporary pottery piece that speaks to the issue you have researched. Using contemporary pottery techniques you will create a contemporary piece of pottery that speaks to the current issue you have chosen. In addition to the essays, I will be keeping a daily journal on class observations, and I will be asking for volunteers for a short interview at the end of the class. Photos will be taken to record the process of creating the contemporary pottery pieces. Upon completion of this assignment, you will be asked to write a reflection of your contemporary clay piece. All students' pottery pieces will be placed in an exhibition for the public to view. At the conclusion of this study, all photos, sketches, transcribed discussions, and interview notes will be compiled and analyzed to see the connection between the contemporary pottery pieces and the current issues selected by the students.

Time required: The study will take place intermittently over a course of nine weeks.

Risks and Benefits: There are no serious risks involved in your participation in this study. The findings of this study may lead to a further in-depth research on the subject of contemporary pottery. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, except through this study and process you will hopefully gain a greater understanding of your world, and how your art can be used to make a statement of your world.

Compensation: None

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your first name will only be used in referencing your work, photos of you creating your piece, and transcribed discussions. Your name will not be used in any report without your written permission.

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

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence; however, you are required to complete the class assignments as they will be graded.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Principal Investigator: Kim Moran, Fort Walton Beach High School, 833-3300, ext. 1502 email: morankd@mail.okaloosa.k12.fl.us

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 voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Print Name _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Principal Investigator:  _____



Appendix B

Contemporary Ceramic Artworks and Statements by Research Participants.



Issue: Teenage Suicide

Title: Choice of Life

My piece shows how teens with depression everyday have to make a choice whether to live or die. In my piece I have the young teen reaching out to the angel who resembles life and the reaper which resembles death. The young teen is faced with the decision of whether to live and move on in life or to choose a different route, which affects everyone around them. (Artist statement, Meagan H., June 2013)



Issue: Abortion

Title: The Choice?

I chose abortion because I feel it is a great debate that continues in our world today. Pro-life thinks abortion is wrong (represented by the blue chips) and Pro-choice (represented by the red chips) believes it is up to the mother to decide. Personally, I think it's your body, it is your choice. (Artist statement, Amber B., June, 2013)

Incised statement on the piece, "Every breathe is a choice" (Amber B., June, 2013)



Issue: Sexual Abuse

Title: Silently Spoken

My piece is about sexual abuse. The tape over the mouth conveys this issue without words being spoken. It shows how much something can hurt a person. I feel very strongly about this issue because I was a victim of sexual abuse and I feel that it is an issue that is often kept hidden or "looked over". (Artist statement, Caitlyn S., June, 2013)



Issue: Drug Abuse

Title: Never Let Go

I chose Drug Abuse as the issue to create my contemporary piece because of how it directly affected me, personally. A family member who had been prescribed a drug used for ADD/ADHD had become addicted while on the drug for seven years. When the economy took a turn for the worst, they lost their job. I hope the public understands what I am trying to portray through my piece. Drug abuse can cause one to lose not only members of their family but themselves as well. (Artist statement, Courtney F., June, 2013)



Issue: Teenage Pregnancy

Title: Life at a Fast Pace

I chose to make my contemporary piece about teenage pregnancy because this is one of the problems of young girls being mischievous. Teenage pregnancy is starting to become common because it is not frowned upon like it was years ago. It is merely accepted. I chose to make three girls to represent how common it has become. This problem can have many effects on young teenage girls. Many do not finish their education. They have to grow up and take on a parent role, one they really are not ready for. Teenage moms give up their youth in order to raise their child by themselves or by their parents. Many end up as single parents with no high school diploma. (Artist Statement, Mylana B., June 2013)



Issue: Human Trafficking

Title: Lookout!

My piece is about human trafficking. This issue is worldwide and affects people of all walks of life. My piece is a half globe and it shows some of the countries where human trafficking occurs. The children are from different countries that are in constant fear because they have been abducted. They are surrounded by a chain that has them bound into a life of misery. Their hands cover their eyes because they live in fear. (Artist statement, Deja B., June, 2013)



Issue: Global Warming

Title: The Beginning of the End

My piece is a half melting earth, melting in on itself. I was influenced by the amount of people that aren't concerned with this issue, "global warming." I perceive it as a literal translation for the earth, "melting" from global warming. I think and hope the audience understands the message I have tried to convey through my contemporary piece. (Artist statement, Ian B., June, 2013)



Issue: BP Oil Spill

Title: Sheet of Destruction

My contemporary piece deals with the Gulf Coast oil spill that occurred two years ago. It caused a lot of problems for the people who lived on the water. I created my piece with animals covered in the oil and a barrel pouring oil. I did this to show that we weren't the only ones who were affected, the animals were to. I hope the public sees that the oil spills affect different kinds of animals in and near the water. I hope my piece will influence the public to be more cautious around the water and help prevent an incident like this. (Artist statement, Katie F., June, 2013)



Issue: Breast Cancer

Title: The Beautiful Ribbons

When I made this piece I wanted to represent all the brave women struggling with breast cancer as well as all the women who are breast cancer survivors. (Artist statement, Austin B., June, 2013)



Issue: Hunger in the World

Title: The Empty Feeling

My piece is about child hunger in America. I chose to do this because it is a problem that most people don't know about or even aware of. My piece has children trying to get into the bowl to see if there is any food left for them. The mirror represents you and what you see as you peer into the empty bowl. Hopefully, you will feel what it is like to be in that situation. (Artist statement, Brittany C., June, 2013)



Issue: Animal Abuse

Title: Silently Abuse

The issue I have chosen is animal abuse. Animal abuse is one of my pet peeves. I think animal abuse is one of the most disgusting things in the world. Animals are defenseless. Animals cannot stop the abuse. They can't tell anyone or even do anything about it. So please, don't abuse animals. It is not right. (Artist statement, Kayla S., June 2013)



Issue: Animal Abuse

Title: Napoleon's Story

My contemporary piece focuses on animal abuse. Napoleon, the dog, grows up and suffers from abuse. He is rescued and taken to a doctor and eventually becomes healthy again. My piece shows the life of an animal who suffered from abuse and through awareness of this issue becomes a survivor. I hope my piece speaks to the heart of others. (Artist statement, Payton L., June, 2013)



Issue: BP Oil Spill

Title: Death of Many, Known by Few

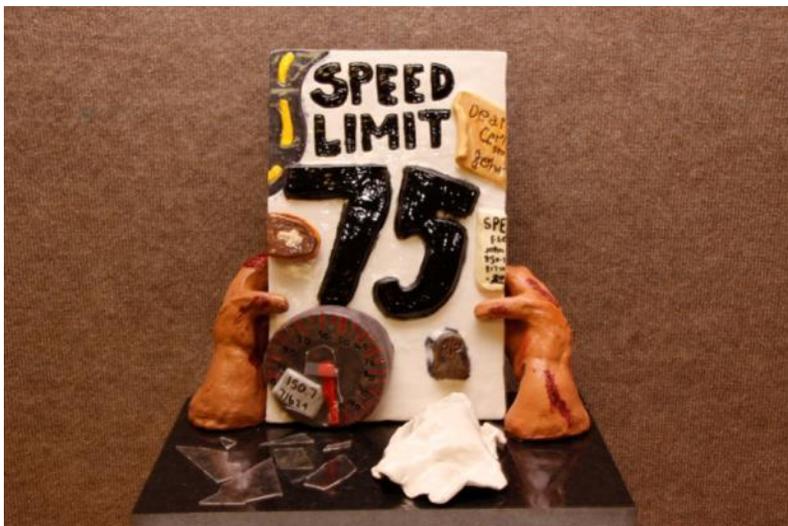
I chose the BP oil spill that occurred here in the Gulf of Mexico as my issue. I chose this issue because the beach and the ocean are my home away from home. I created my piece this way because I wanted to show the great amount of oil that spilled into the Gulf of Mexico and the death of many sea creatures. I hope people see how devastating the oil spill really was and how it not only affected the people but how it affected the animals and the cycle of the ocean life. (Artist statement, Emma G., June, 2013)



Issue: Littering

Title: Don't be Bitter, Clean up Your Litter

My piece deals with the issue of littering. With the growth of populations, littering has become more of an issue. I chose this because one night a bear was eating out of our garbage can right outside my window. The bears are attracted because of the trash around my neighborhood. It was a scary experience and making this contemporary piece would be a memory my mom and I could never forget. (Artist statement, Jamie H., June, 2013)



Issue: Speeding

Title: Don't put the Pedal to the Metal

There were so many topics I could have chosen from, but speeding spoke the loudest to me. I'm currently enrolled and active in a leadership class as well as SGA-Student Government Association. In March our school's SGA team attended the state SGA in West Palm Beach, FL. During our weekend stay we were listened to motivational speakers, one being Cara Filler. She travels to spread her story of how she her identical twin sister was killed the day after their eighteenth birthday due to a person speeding. Her speech really changed me, making me aware of how serious speeding is. Speeding puts our life on the line as well as others. Being a teenager and entering the driving world, I felt this topic would relate to many people regardless of age. (Artist statement, Alexa R., June, 2013)



Issue: Discriminated Against for Music Style

Title: The Sound of Metal

Music is my life. I chose to create my contemporary piece based on the music I listen to. I always find it ridiculous and somewhat sad when people judge others on such small things, music choice being one. I don't believe people should be treated different or seen in a negative way simply because of what they like. (Artist statement, Courtney B., June, 2013)



Issue: Online Dating

Title: Love from a Distance

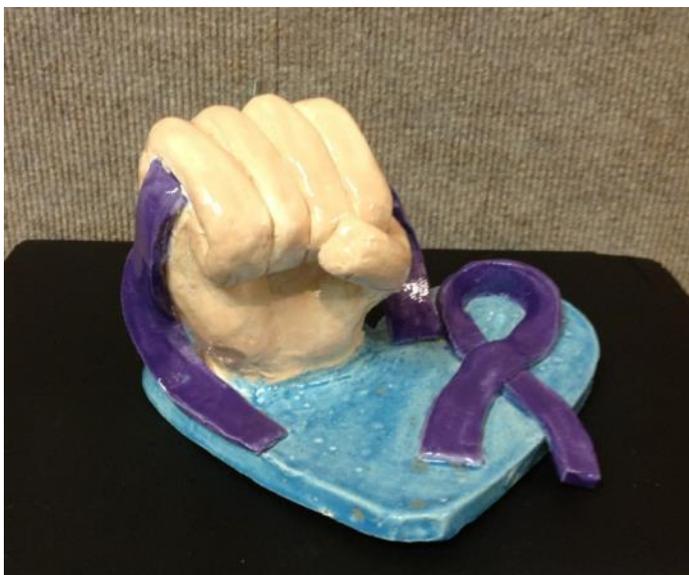
Online dating has become a major issue among young people. Seven words describe my contemporary piece. Loneliness, the feeling of being along and not being able to physically touch the person. Upset, the tear on her face shows it. Longing, her hand reaching out to the computer screen. Imagery, images in her mind about her and her significant other kissing, holding hands, and being able to spend time together. Regrets, for taking a chance with the online dating experience. Focus, especially with teen online dating because one can become unfocused on school and things they need to get done. Online dating can be an emotional roller coaster. (Artist statement, Antonia H., June, 2013)



Issue: Inter-racial relationships

Title: Color Blind

I chose the issue of inter-racial couples/marriage because I have chosen to date guys of different races. I hope that people perceive my piece as a bi-racial family. The hands of the parents cradle their baby, protecting it from the criticism and harshness of the world. I perceive my piece as my possible future. (Artist statement, Mahaley R., June, 2013)



Issue: Cancer Awareness

Title: You-nity

I chose to look at the issue of how cancer affects many people from all walks of life. I named my piece "You-nity" because it focuses on how cancer is an ever present issue. My piece has a balled fist, which is an internationally known symbol for "unity" with a purple ribbon, which is used by the American Cancer Society to symbolize cancer. The base of my piece is a bluish color to represent the world and the importance of cancer and its effect on the world. This issue has an ever present effect on my family because both of my parents are cancer survivors. (Artist statement, Kory F., June, 2013)



Issue: Water Pollution

Title: Toxic Waves

For my contemporary piece I chose to look at water pollution and how it affects me and where I live. Marine life is greatly affected and many marine animals end up getting harmed or even die due to people polluting the water. I hope that through my contemporary piece people gain an understanding of the negative impact water pollution has on our environment. (Artist statement, Lauren S., June, 2013)

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Author Biography

Kimberly D. Moran has been teaching art in Fort Walton Beach, Florida since 1989. Her teaching experience includes teaching art in four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools in Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia. Kimberly grew up in Kingsport, Tennessee where she attended Sullivan West High School. In 1981, she graduated from East Tennessee State University where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in art education. She also received a certification in General Science and has also taught 7th grade science and Biology I.

Kimberly currently lives in Fort Walton Beach, Florida with her husband, two sons, and five shih tzus. She loves to spend time with her family, go for walks on the beach, walks with her dogs, and play her hammer dulcimer. She loves working in watercolor and throwing on the potter's wheel as well as hand-building. She and her husband enjoy amateur photography, photographing weddings, pets, events, and portraits. Kimberly participates and supports the local art organizations of Fort Walton Beach and strives to expose her student's work to the public.