

A MATERIAL CULTURE ORIENTED STAFF DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE FOR
INCREASING FACULTY CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

By

HOLLY THARP

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 MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2013

© 2013 Holly Tharp

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jodi Kushins for her ongoing support during this educational journey I chose to participate during the last two years. She is an inspiration and pushed for excellence in everything we did during this program. I would also like to thank Dr. Michelle Tillander for her wonderful stories and advice during the research and capstone endeavors. The University of Florida Art Education faculty have created a remarkable program filled with educators and artists from whom I learned and have been inspired.

Summary of Capstone Project

PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

A MATERIAL CULTURE ORIENTED STAFF DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE FOR
INCREASING FACULTY CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

By

Holly Tharp

2013

Chair: Dr. Jodi Kushins
Member: Dr. Michelle Tillander
Major: Art Education

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study how *cultural responsiveness* amongst fine art faculty members might be increased by means of a staff development initiative in an art department at my university. The staff development model included surveys, discussions, journaling, and art production by participating faculty members. Informed by a *material culture* oriented approach, faculty utilized personal objects and artifacts to create artworks that provided space for us to examine and share our own cultural influences. The works were ultimately shown in a gallery setting. Following the show, we considered how we might develop more culturally responsive

teaching practices based on reflections of our own artmaking and through examination of selected research findings about cultural responsiveness in teaching.

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract.....	4
Contents	6
Introduction.....	8
A Unique Situation	8
Statement of Problem.....	10
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions.....	11
Rationale and Significance of Study.....	12
Definition of Terms.....	13
Limitations of the Study	13
Literature Review	13
Exploration of Cultural Responsiveness and Material Culture Study	14
The Art of Cultural Responsiveness	16
Conclusion	19
Methodology	20
Subjects.....	21
Research Site.....	22

Data Collection Procedure and Instrumentation	22
Data Analysis Procedures	24
Findings.....	24
Personally Touched.....	24
How Do We Engage?	25
Diversity and Bias.....	26
Objects, Heirlooms, and Memories	27
The Project: Faculty Artwork	28
Faculty Reflections	29
Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications	32
Interpretations of my Findings.....	33
Significance of my Findings	33
Recommendations.....	34
Future Plans	34
References.....	36
Appendix A: Readings.....	38
Appendix B: Images of Faculty Artwork	39
Author Biography	51

Introduction

I was walking through the art studio checking the progress of my students and passed a young man who had his sketchbook open, pencil in hand, pages empty. He was looking at the paper as if magically something would appear on its own. We began a conversation that I probably would not have had if I hadn't recently read about cultural responsiveness in the journal *Art Education*. The student wanted to visually represent a story, but could not think of where to start or what he wanted to say. I asked him where he was from and what his favorite things were as a child and his face lit up. He told me about being from Peru and some of the stories he used to hear as a kid; one was about an evil bird that would sit on the roof of the house where someone was going to die. I looked at him and said, "You have your story...". He immediately put pencil to paper and started visually brainstorming how he could tell this story. I walked away happy because not only had I learned some personal information about one of my students, which is sometimes difficult, but I felt confident he was going to create an interesting, unique artwork as well.

A Unique Situation

I am the department chair of fine arts at a media entertainment university located in the southeast United States. I am responsible for the curriculum of six campus (face-to-face), online and hybrid classes. I also supervise 17 art educators and anywhere from 3-6 interns. The fine arts faculty is made up of three females and 14 males who are fine artists, animators, 3D modelers, game artists and illustrators. The faculty position requires a bachelor's degree in one of the aforementioned areas and four years professional experience in the computer animation, game

art and design or the fine arts industry. The fine arts team is made up of mostly male (14 men and three female) Caucasian Americans, but also includes one African American, one Asian American, one European and one South American, all grew up in middle class homes, and highly successful in their areas of expertise.

Our program's curriculum is condensed and accelerated, requiring the students to complete one or two undergraduate three-credit hour class each month for a total of up to 24 to 36 months to earn a bachelor's degree. Each three-credit hour course includes 68 instructor contact hours per month, and the students must attend another 60 hours in open studio sessions (faculty present) to successfully complete each course in the curriculum. According to *College Navigator* (2011) our school has 76% men and 24% women attending; 54% are under the age of 24 and 46% are 25 and older. 75% of our students are from out of state and 2% are from foreign countries (See Figure 1). The students in the fine arts department range in age from 18-50, have beginning to professional level artistic skills, and will continue studies later in 3D modeling (characters and environment), animation, special FX, scripting and rigging, and concept art. The faculty is diverse in culture and artistic skill sets and so are our students. Although on the surface this situation would seem to bring cultural awareness into the classroom intrinsically; this is not the case. We have a short amount of time with the students and a curriculum based on real world production needs. How can our team become more culturally responsive? Is it possible in our unique situation?

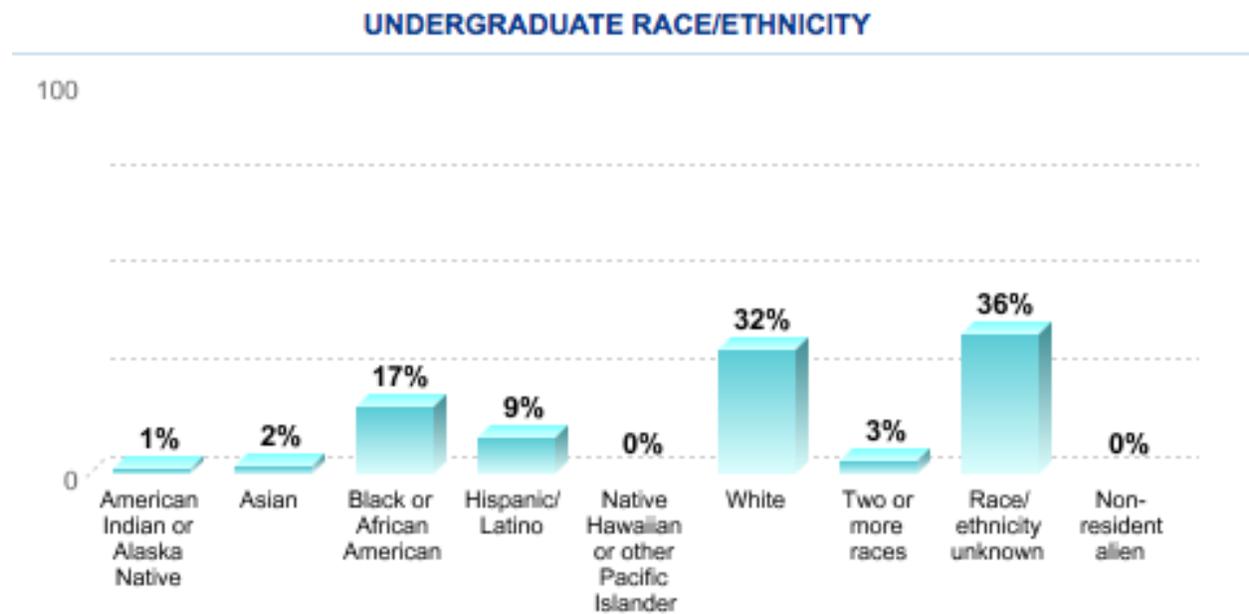


Figure 1. Student demographics at my university from nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator

Statement of Problem

There are two concerns that I wanted to address in my leadership of this art program, with the help of the fine arts team at my university. First, the faculty have continued to indicate feelings of increasing disconnect with our progressively diverse student population. Second, over the past five years we, as a team, have noticed that the quality and originality, or creativity, of the students' artwork in general is on the decline. As the fine arts faculty, we have been searching to come up with ways to inspire meaningful, unique, and creative artwork in our classrooms. To these ends, the fine arts faculty has discussed multicultural approaches and its benefits in the classroom, both to help students identify and generate original content for their artwork. All of the fine art faculty agree that we must be capable of infusing multicultural perspectives into the

curriculum, and that with our experienced faculty and diverse student population we should be able to find some solutions to both of the above concerns.

I believe focusing on cultural responsiveness, informed by material culture studies in our curriculum, will help us bridge the engagement gap between faculty and students. I also believe that we can try to solve the issue of unoriginality in student work completed in our courses by helping the students look to themselves, their pasts and present for inspiration instead of relying on outside resources.

Purpose of the Study

There were two intended outcomes of this research. First, I wanted to introduce my colleagues to the theories of culturally responsive and material culture approaches to teaching. I wanted to encourage them to explore their own backgrounds and how their artwork and teaching are impacted by their own cultural influences. I wanted a better understanding of ways in which the art educators at my university might become more culturally responsive to the increasingly diverse students who now populate our classrooms; and how they envision future development of a culturally responsive perspective and pedagogy in our studio setting. A corollary outcome of this research was to identify ways we, the art educators at my university, might foster originality and creativity in student artwork.

Research Questions

I narrowed my interests in this research down to two questions I believed I would be able to answer through the experience with the fine arts faculty. The two questions were:

1. How can the fine arts faculty at the university become more aware of culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning through reading, discussion, and artmaking?
2. In what ways will the participating faculty consider new ideas about engaging students in culturally responsive strategies, philosophies and activities in regards to creative and innovative art practice?

Rationale and Significance of Study

The student population within the fine arts department at my university is extremely diverse, with varying ages, artistic skill sets, cultures and artistic interests. The fine arts curriculum is currently inquiry based¹, and the faculty have continued to search for ways in which we can engage the students and inspire more meaningful, creative and original artwork. I have been able to incorporate elements of different educational theories brought to my attention through my studies in art education this year, and have been inspired by art educators such as Paul Bolin and Doug Blandy, along with curriculum theorists Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design curriculum model. Bolin and Blandy's (2012) essay on investigating material culture helped me understand how these strategies can be worked into almost any subject matter. The research I have done on material culture and culturally responsive teaching practices led me

¹ Inquiry-based instruction as we use it is an instruction approach that engages students in investing real world questions that they choose within a broad thematic framework. It is a vehicle for students to connect traditional instruction with their interests by allowing them to acquire, analyze, develop ideas and come up solutions for art and design in the studio setting.

to believe elements of these aforementioned theories can be intertwined in our current curriculum to help cultivate the atmosphere of innovation and creativity we are looking for with more meaningful staff and student engagement.

Definition of Terms

Culture. Culture is the systems of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts with which the members of society use to understand their world and one another (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006).

Cultural Responsiveness. Cultural responsiveness refers to the ability to learn from and relate respectfully to people from your own and other cultures (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006).

Material Culture. Material culture is the study of the beliefs-values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a particular community or society through artifacts (Prown, 1982).

Limitations of the Study

During this investigation the manner in which my staff developed their own understandings of cultural responsiveness and how what they have learned might inspire teaching methods that build on students' cultural strengths have been documented. We were not developing new curriculum during this research, just preparing faculty to think differently about engagement with each other and students. Hopefully, in the future we can use this experience to look at changing or creating curriculum and assignments.

Literature Review

I explored two topics in my review of professional literature for this project: *culturally responsive pedagogy* and *material culture*. I researched sources from the last 50 years about material culture theories, multiculturalism, and what I could find on cultural responsiveness. but

selected those that were directly relevant to my investigation, and ultimately I used some of the information I found to conduct my staff development initiative. The shared readings helped participating faculty understand these concepts and their potential applications of in a university art-learning environment.

Exploration of Cultural Responsiveness and Material Culture Study

Gussin Palley (2000) asks, “Is this classroom in which I live a fair place for every child who enters? Does every child and family have an equal say in the world we invent?” (p. xv). *Culturally responsive*² teaching is a term many scholars credit to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) who describes it as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using students’ own and other cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The interest in culturally relevant pedagogy started because of the disparity in academic performance and literacy among African American students in America’s public schools during the 1980s (Ladson-Billing, 1992). Rather than asking students to acclimate and assimilate to *White* America, culturally relevant teaching recognizes and celebrates the student culture present in the learning environment (Ladson-Billing, 1992). My reading has led me to believe that the most important element of culturally responsive teaching is the interpersonal perspective that exists between the educator and the students.

The use of the term material culture has, and continues to, transform since its inception sometime between the late 19th and early 20th century. Material culture studies began in the

² Ladson-Billing is credited with the term *culturally relevant*; however, the pedagogy is referred to as culturally responsive.

disciplines of archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology and the intersection between them, anthropological archaeology (Hicks, 2010). Objects, traditions, and ethnicity are all part of material culture studies, including the relationship between these facets and archeology, history and the culture of communities. According to Bolin and Blandy (2003), material culture is “a descriptor of any and all human-constructed or human-mediated objects, forms, or expressions, manifested consciously or unconsciously through culturally acquired behaviors” (p. 249). Material culture studies are about investigation into historical and contemporary objects and expression (Bolin & Blandy, 2012). Could the use of material culture strategies provide a pathway to a culturally relevant environment for students and teachers?

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt), which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, defines cultural responsiveness as the “ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures” (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006, p. 12). We should not only consider art on a surface level but also *non-art* objects as well; this concept seems related to those posited within material culture studies. Artists sometimes use artifacts and remnants from their surroundings to create works that become visual investigations of their own culture; objects and images add influence to stories, meaning and expression. According to Flemings (1974), perspectives of material culture studies present us with a way to view contemporary art as cultural artifacts.

Lucy Andrus (2001) argued that teachers have to focus on themselves through exploration and acceptance of one’s own cultural heritage and through examination of personal feelings about other’s cultural backgrounds to pursue becoming culturally responsive. They must value difference and accept other cultures and must have the feeling that it is beneficial to them

to do this. A unit of study on contemporary art, personal objects or artifacts might be a perfect place to start investigating how to bring cultural responsiveness into the studio.

The Art of Cultural Responsiveness

I found many examples of what I believe to be successful integration of both cultural responsiveness and material culture strategies in my reading. The following are examples of an art history lesson, an exhibition with the community in mind and a memoir. They include the work of an associate professor and program director of art history teaching students using family heirlooms, a museum and a school district working together to build community and culture, and lastly, an educator exploring her own identity and responsibilities to her students.

“Object lesson”: *Using family heirlooms to engage students in art history*. Marice Rose is Associate Professor and Program Director in the Art History program at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut. Rose (2012) documented the details of one of her assignments for an undergraduate introductory art history class in an article for *Art Education*. The objectives for this class include consideration of the creation and reception of art and to understand the context of art in real people’s lives. Rose (2012) claims that the process of describing and reflecting on family heirlooms promotes student motivation within her class and those who engage in objects close to their families’ lives, becoming sensitive to the connections that people and communities make with works of art. The assignment prompts students to answer such questions such as: what is the object, what does it look like, who made it, when and where was it made, why is it meaningful to our family, and: why is it art? The students learn that art does not have to be *high art* such as painting or sculptures, but can be textiles, ceramics or jewelry as well. Students begin to see the arts as a human connection, and it fosters a sense of belonging, cultural relevance,

personal relevance and emotion; the introduction of family heirlooms revealed surprising cultural diversity in the art history classes.

30 Americans: An inspiration for culturally responsive teaching. The Corcoran Gallery of Art and Corcoran College of Art and Design teamed up to create an exhibit titled *30 Americans* (<http://www2.corcoran.org/30americans/home>), an exhibition that was organized around the African American idea of artistic community and legacy, emphasizing relationships between artists across generations (Powell, 2012). The gallery presented opportunities for cultural responsiveness in eight ways: visiting artist series, meet the artist lectures, under the influence local artists, community artist-in-residences, full circle symposiums, cell phone tours and audience response feedback and participation.

The staff, faculty and graduate students of the Corcoran along with a subcommittee made up of teachers, scholars, artists, and collectors created a curriculum based on the exhibit for educators. The curriculum focuses on 16 of the artists and incorporates topics and themes that resonate with middle and high school students (Powell, 2012). The museum had a free event for educators in which they passed out *30 American* resource packets; they also sent the packets to all educators that requested tours and gave the tour of the exhibit for free along with a hands-on workshop that explored artists from the exhibit and Corcoran's collection. This collaboration shows that museums and other educational institutions can work together in order to help communities understand one another more and get them excited about the cultures represented. The partnership created by the Corcoran Gallery of Art and Corcoran College of Art and Design with their local community shows a commitment to culturally responsive teaching, having aspects of personal, national and global identity.

White Teacher is a book written in 1979 by educator Vivian Gussin Paley and chronicles her struggles and celebrations with her own identity and the growing diverse student population during her first years of teaching kindergarten. She wrote, “It is often hard to learn from people who are just like you. Too much is taken for granted. Homogeneity is fine in a bottle of milk, but in the classroom it diminishes the curiosity that ignites discovery (Gussin Paley, 1979, p. 53). In Gussin Paley’s observations of her own behavior she found that she not only avoided race and religion, but evaded conversations and judgment about personal attributes and family circumstances. Children want to know if their teacher likes them and if you think they are worthy; not knowing them, their background and their family keeps you from knowing a student’s anxiousness and fear. She also recognized in her observations that behavior and social issues could be worked out much easier in the classroom if students feel safe sharing with each other. “The art table is a good place to be if you are not ready for complicated social problems. You can first gain courage with materials you are able to control, and then transfer these feelings to the social arena” (Gussin Paley, 1979, p. 65). One of Gussin Paley’s students was curious about everything, she asked questions and was observant and thoughtful. She would adapt styles of others if it suited her for the day and was equally as curious about the teacher’s ideas. What struck Gussin Paley (1979) was that this child realized that a teacher’s plans were no more useful than those of her classmates. This philosophy opens up possibilities for cultural responsiveness and could cause students to delve deeper for hidden meaning behind something as simple as family heirlooms; it is not just about the object but the characters, ideas, forms, images, identity, culture, and family represented by those objects.

Conclusion

Taking the viewpoint that cultural responsiveness is necessary in order to be conscientious educators, there are some techniques and strategies we can use to lure, engage and inspire students to learn. We must investigate ourselves first, according to Richards, Brown, and Forde (2006) of NCCREST and look into our personal belief system. This should allow us to be mindful when presenting materials and work harder to give students an accurate presentation of what they will explore in their learning. This process is about history: the past, the present and the future, personally and globally. It may lead to uncomfortable situations in some cases but hopefully will also bring the faculty and students together collectively. Most importantly, it will guide faculty and students to a greater understanding of those that surround us and their view of the world.

After reading extensively about material culture, I believe educators can utilize a material culture-oriented curriculum approach in many academic disciplines, especially in art education settings. Art appreciation, aesthetics and history lend themselves to the study of other cultures because art and design are present all over the world, whether in Patrick Dougherty's stick works, Frank Gehry's EMP Museum, or West African sculpture; examining artifacts and objects is a part of a well-rounded art education. In my experience teaching aesthetics, studio, art criticism, and art history courses, art education usually includes discussions related to the art world, artists, artistic tradition, emotion, and reason. My colleagues and I teach the differences between objectivity and subjectivity as it relates to criticism, and using material culture strategies would allow us to bring forward such considerations more explicitly and with due respect for diverse cultural contexts and meanings. Gussin Paley (1979) wrote, "Teaching children with different

cultural and language experiences kept pushing me toward the growing edge” (p. 112) and I couldn’t agree more.

Methodology

I used action research³ to facilitate and examine a staff development initiative intended to promote culturally responsive teaching practices. There are four basic themes in action research: empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change (Ferrance, 2000). These were also the goals of my staff development initiative. In her booklet *Action Research*, Ferrance (2000) suggests five steps to be taken when doing action research: (a) identify the problem; (b) design, study, and gather data; (c) interpret the data; (d) act on the evidence or begin again with new and better questions; and (f) use findings to improve your practice. I attempted to demonstrate Ferrance’s steps in my research process through this staff development initiative. As I have stated before, one of the problem areas that has been identified by the fine arts faculty at my university is a perception amongst faculty of the lack of significant engagement between staff and students. As a team we would like to know how to ask relevant questions in the classroom to encourage more meaningful, original, and creative artwork. I believed an art making experience using material culture strategies was central to this initiative. The fine arts faculty began an investigation into cultural responsiveness by participating in the review and group discussion of literature relating to material culture and

³ Action research is conducted in a classroom or school setting and provides practitioners the opportunity to identify and solve their own educational problems (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006).

cultural responsive theories and practices (see Appendix A). The faculty kept online journals of their responses, opinions, and ideas about the subject matter (*cultural responsiveness* and *material cultural*), then ultimately participated in art making that examines and interprets objects and artifacts that represent their own culture or family. We created visual interpretations, reflections and expressions using various media that showcased our diversity and individuality.

There were possible concerns about my role as the researcher, participant and direct manager of the faculty in regards to collusion or forced involvement. There are 17 faculty members in the fine arts department, and 11 (excluding myself) volunteered to participate; no faculty member was obligated to contribute. Our department works as a team in regards to decision making; I am ultimately responsible for all of the curriculum and also have the “last word”, however, we meet monthly to discuss possible changes, concerns and any other items related to our studios. We also are affiliated with each other outside of work, not just in the arts community but also as close friends. We share studio space, have art exhibits together and lead community workshops with each other. Having this relationship with my peers made this research “easy” for me, we have always shared openly about many subjects and this research actually made us a closer team.

Subjects

There are 17 staff members who teach in the fine arts department at the university both on campus and online. Their age range is 26-43 years old, three are females and 14 are males.⁴

⁴ Of the 17 staff, 13 are Caucasian, one is African American, one Asian, one European, and one South American.

Of the 17, six work online teaching 50-75 students each month and 14 work on campus, face-to-face with between 60-100 students per month. 12 of the 17 agreed to participate in the staff initiative and their identities and opinions were kept confidential through the use of online applications that allow subjects to remain unidentified. Their answers were scrambled so that the reader would not be able to track each participant's answers. Subjects knew that they were going to take part in a graduate research project and would have to journal, read, discuss, and create artwork.

Research Site

My research took place at a university in a mid-sized town in the Southeast, on campus in a fine arts studio setting, a campus gallery space as well as online journaling and off campus discussions.

Data Collection Procedure and Instrumentation

I used discussions, online journaling and surveying, and artwork to systematically gather perspectives and practices on cultural responsiveness teaching from the fine arts faculty and the engagement practices used within the department. Using these provided me with a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to work with as I reflected on the study.

My research and data collection began with a discussion amongst the fine arts faculty. I asked, "What makes a culturally responsive educator?" Faculty answers to this question and other key questions were tracked and recorded in four online journal surveys. We revisited this question and other key questions relating to cultural responsiveness again at the end of the initiative.

To introduce the faculty to culturally responsiveness and material culture methodologies we did some readings followed by an online journaling process to reflect on the reading. We created a collective Pinterest board, (www.pinterest.com) and began to post meaningful heirlooms, objects, visuals or stories from our family, childhood or culture. Finally, we created original art works, which incorporated these personal objects, images or artifacts with the intent to express meaning and provide personal cultural insight about ourselves to each other. We kept an online journal describing our intention and experience during the art making and provided a final reflection after completion. The team discussion following the completion of the artwork focused on how we, as contemporary artists, can use and interact with personal objects and artifacts to create more original meaningful, and unique work. The team discussed what they learned about each other through material culture, tracking the similarities and differences in opinions about the experience and the learning that took place. A faculty art exhibit closed the research with conversation and reaction about the artwork from viewers.

The following documentation informed my (and our) efforts:

- Faculty Journals: Each faculty participated in an online journal focusing on three areas: The experience during the initial team discussion and a description of what they learned, and what they still question about cultural responsiveness and finally descriptions and reflections during the art making and at the closing of the show.
- Artwork (personal objects, image or artifacts): Faculty posted initial ideas, images, and stories on a private board on Pinterest.com and participate in a faculty art exhibit.
- Final artwork and descriptions were posted to a Google presentation.

- A faculty art exhibit was opened in a gallery on campus for other faculty members to view.

Data Analysis Procedures

There were several ways I made sense of the data I collected. I compared the faculty journal entries at the onset of the team discussion and the faculty reflections following the final art exhibit. I cataloged the similarities and differences in faculty opinions, comments, and questions throughout the research process and logged patterns and trends among the participants. Finally, I created a visualized representation of the findings and artwork using Google presentation through the documentation of the faculty art making process, questions/comments, and narratives.

Findings

Personally Touched

I hoped that this project would show that the staff realized that they could do more to engage the students in a meaningful way by paying attention to their cultural backgrounds and inviting those stories and histories into their classrooms. This research was an opportunity for faculty to become more aware of their own culture and belief systems and for us as a team to become more culturally responsive in our studio. I expected that there would be surprises in what the staff found out about each other and themselves, which would cause them to rethink the way they interact with our diverse population.

I *didn't* expect that the faculty would be touched as personally as they were or that any of them would find this experience difficult. Searching into family history and unfolding memories produced varied emotional responses by participants; their journals contained both positive and

negative feelings about their families and history. One faculty member shared a personal revelation and shared with us that they were recently cleaning their home and ridding it of old unwanted books and objects. Reading “Object Lesson” (Rose, 2012) altered her original plans and went through their belongings a second time. An old book that she has had since childhood brought memories back, visualizing her room, parents reading the book to her and experiences with friends and family. In the end, the participant stated, “I was amazed at the memories a single book triggered, then the book became an extension of me and I felt as though if I were to toss away this book I may never again recall those pieces of my life”.

Several of the faculty wrote that this was a difficult process for them personally, but felt the idea of involving personal elements in their classes would be beneficial, keeping work from being static and unemotional. More than once, it was stated in different ways by the faculty that the work created allowed us to think about “what I know about my family and share a bit about what I know about my own origins”., and what we originally thought might be too personal turned out to be a great experience. In the end, the faculty learned about each other and was surprised at our own rich cultural heritage and history.

How Do We Engage?

I began to collect data prior to any discussion pertaining to cultural responsiveness, material culture, or student engagement. My staff and I already knew that we had issues with student engagement, lack of creativity, and originality in student artwork, so I began by asking the faculty participants questions that set the stage for my staff initiative and positioned the faculty to begin to open themselves up to their peers in a more personal way which directly

relates to how we engage each other and our students. Answers to the questions concerning engagement varied.

- Some faculty choose to engage students by talking about themselves and where they get inspiration.
- Other faculty work with students either one-on-one or small groups.
- Several see engagement in the form of staying on top of trends and contemporary happenings.
- Finally, several ask personal questions about the background of the students and their families.

Diversity and Bias

Part of researching our engagement in the classroom was to question ourselves about how we perceive others and to find out if we carry any bias into the classroom. As stated previously, the fine arts faculty has diverse backgrounds, culturally and otherwise, seven of the twelve participants have family who came from or live somewhere outside of the United States. The journal entries posted showed that 59% of the participants have biases towards groups or a type of student; these included but were not limited to religion, race, and work ethic (See Figure 2). According to the journal entries these biases began in a variety of ways; beginning their career as a substitute teacher, growing up in boarding school, parents with alcohol and drug issues, and growing up in the military were among some of the catalysts for bias attitudes.

Objects, Heirlooms, and Memories

Part of the research tasks was for the faculty to pick objects, heirlooms or memories from their families or past and make connections to other cultures or societies based on the objects they picked. One wrote:

Not having any items passed down to me or connected with my family, I am forced to think, instead, of items that I will leave to my children, effectively starting the process. I have some items from my travels, acquired merely for the aesthetics. Now I feel as though I should research a little further into their history to be able to pass that information on.

Discussions that sprung from sharing these items and memories along with the reading (see Appendix A), lead participants to share thoughts such as:

- One can argue that everything on the planet, as well as the planet itself, have been or are human-mediated objects, and all of them are affected by culturally acquired behaviors (in that all acquired behaviors are cultural).
- Art and social engagement are always hand in hand, and one can hardly live without the other. It was just clearer to me how art can help communities to grow stronger and understand each other in a socio-cultural way.
- I did think of the urban artwork that is used in installations usually on the street created to try and raise awareness for a cause or in protest. Like the anti-smoking installations, or the cardboard installation used to raise awareness for homelessness, or the rainbow painted house next to the westboro church used for lgbt causes.

I learned from these and other comments that participants find art in community projects, social engagement, and personal objects. Ultimately it can be argued that everything we touch physically, culturally or socially can be considered art in some way or another. Although participants focused on one particular aspect of the subject matter, each wrote about something that touched them personally. Depending on each person's history the reactions or feelings that come from heirlooms, objects and memories affect their viewpoint; this is an example of cultural responsiveness in action. Everyone sitting in your studio or classroom will react with varying emotions or opinions on subject matter, understanding this might make educators consider how they approach themes, topics, questions and issues with each other and the students.

The Project: Faculty Artwork

The faculty created final artwork based on family heirlooms, visual images, or memories. We used a private Pinterest board to serve as our platform to view the pre-production⁵ process and the original objects, visuals or memories that were springboards for the final work (See Figure 2). I found that the faculty was equally divided in the use of memories and actual objects for the launch of this endeavor.

Five of the twelve artists used objects or heirlooms they found as the base for their final, two used a visual or photograph from childhood or family as a base, five used memories or incidents as a catalyst and finally one commented on his attitude towards students and society

⁵ The pre-production process is any preliminary work or prototype completed before final production of films, recording or artwork.

through his work. To view work and descriptions visit: [Final Artwork and Descriptions](#) or see Appendix B.

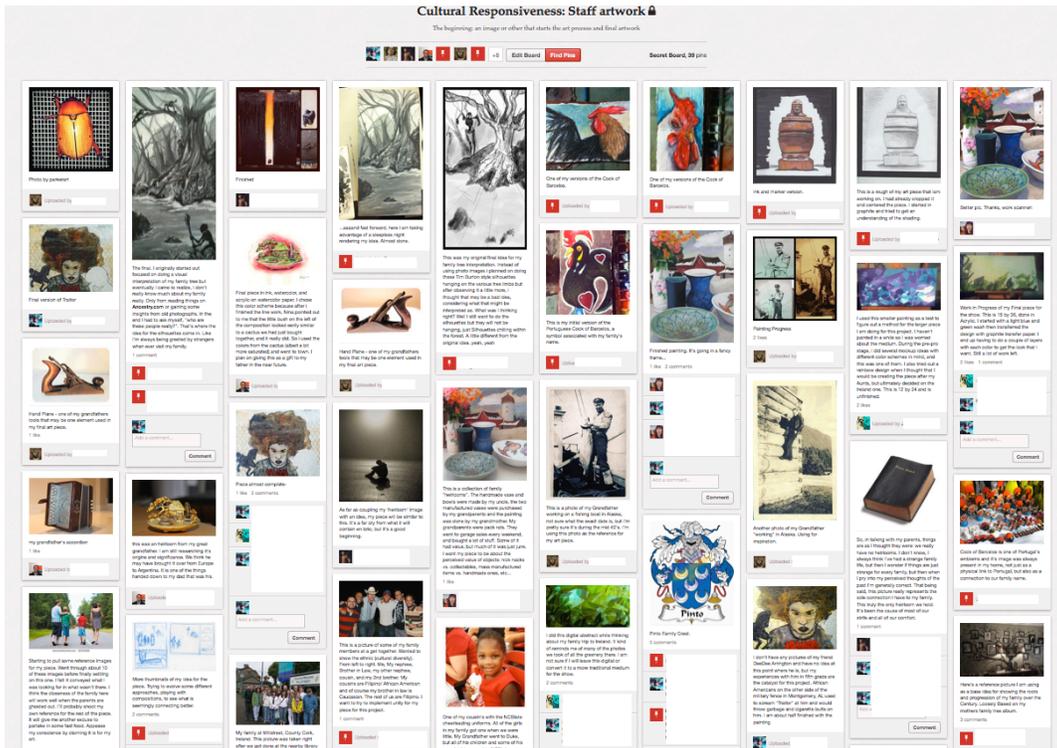


Figure 2. Screen shot of Staff Pinterest board

Faculty Reflections

I asked the faculty to reflect on the experience as a whole, and then answer three questions concerning the initiative. 1) Have you changed your mind about incorporating some of these theories into our curriculum? 2) How have your feelings/thoughts/opinions on engagement changed after this experience? 3) What is one interesting thing you learned about your peers?

Out of eleven responses, two said they had changed their mind, six said “somewhat” and three said “no” (See Figure 3).

Have you changed your mind about incorporating some of these theories into our curriculum?

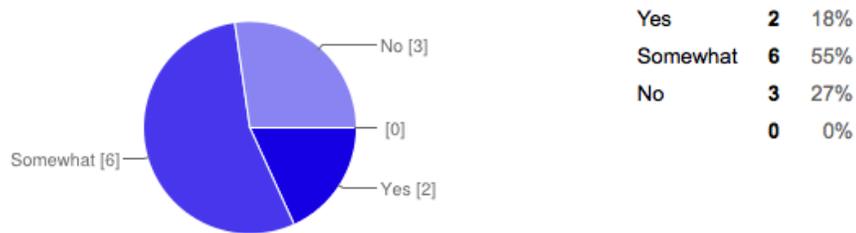


Figure 3. Visual Graphic

Their explanations varied. One wrote,

After continuing research, participating and creating my own cultural art project, I now have a better understanding of these ideas and I enjoyed the process so much that I would enthusiastically suggest the experience to other artists and definitely see the benefits of incorporating these theories into art projects and curriculum.

Only one faculty member remained unenthusiastic about the opportunity of adding cultural responsiveness to our thought process, he stated that he believed that students would not be successful in the real world, “student needs to be exposed to an environment that they may not feel comfortable in and isn't crafted with their culture, feelings, and emotions in mind, an environment that forces them to adapt”. This faculty member wasn't completely against the idea of cultural responsiveness, however, thinks that it wouldn't work with our curriculum and is not good for those who need to learn the mediums. Another felt that the diversity might actually cause problems, writing:

I do feel like this subject could allow students more experimentation, education about their origins and definitely give them a good starting point for their work. However I still feel like this would be a bit risky with the diversity of cultures in a classroom setting and

could cause some issues due to misinterpretations or negative messages in the work that may not have actually affected them but simply used because of the history of their race.

My finding is that although the faculty has positive thoughts about this experience, they don't feel as if our unique curriculum could support a full "culturally responsive" environment, stating many times in their reflections that the *time* would be the biggest issue. They feel that it is important for students to have time to investigate thoroughly and be able to discuss, debate, and create.

Overall, the final reflections show that the faculty, with the exception of two participants, will use some of what they learned during this process while engaging students. Two wrote that they have a better understanding or feel more comfortable presenting and asking questions that may trigger more interesting artwork. The faculty as a whole feels more comfortable asking personal questions of the students after this initiative and will strive to connect in different ways than they have before the initiative. There were more than eight positive comments, three that commented on the artistic process and only one negative comment.

When asked if the faculty thought we could introduce more culturally responsive theories into our unique curriculum, six said yes, two said a little, one said they weren't sure and one said absolutely not (See Figure 4). In explaining their answers to the above, more than a few felt as if we, as a faculty, already incorporate these theories by offering one-on-one mentoring and the wide variety of options of media and subject matter they have available to them in our studios.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

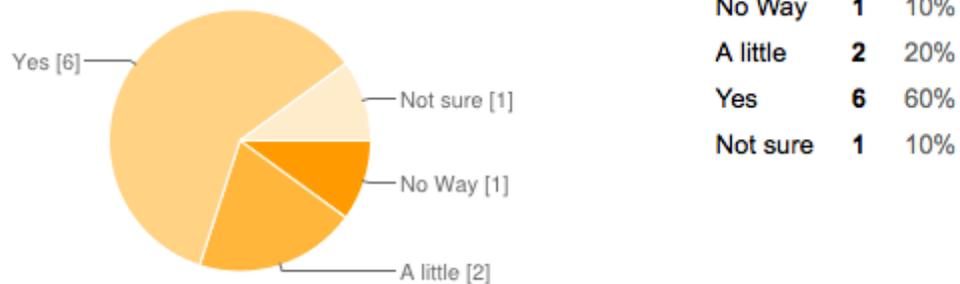


Figure 4. Is there a possibility of adding culturally responsive practices to our curriculum?

Although most agree that this would be good for our curriculum, several felt that,

Due to the specific nature of the required skills and information to be conveyed to the students and due to the accelerated pace of the program, we might be able to scratch at the surface with some of these techniques, though I have found that the pace at which we have to move does not facilitate a great amount of time for reflection and exploration.

Another stated that, “Engaging students to recall these objects, think about them and the connection they have to them, then to create artwork based on these objects would be a positive exercise in learning about themselves and their creativity”.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

My purpose and expectation for this initiative were to introduce cultural responsiveness to the faculty by means of a staff development initiative. I wanted to know if through this experience the staff could develop some new ways to engage students in our studios and if they thought they could use some of the pedagogical ideas brought forth through reflection of this experience to encourage more original and creative student artwork through cultural

responsiveness. I believe that if the faculty had not gone through the process together, no amount of explaining cultural responsiveness would have worked. I found that our personal journey, reflections of process and peer responses taught us as we gained an intrinsic understanding of cultural responsiveness. The final faculty reflections show that we learned about our own families, our “artist” selves and each other.

Interpretations of my Findings

Based on my analysis of the journal entries, discussions and faculty artwork, I believe that this staff initiative helped the fine arts faculty at the university explore culturally responsive behavior, artists and put forth ideas to become more culturally responsive in our dealings with students. If our time and subject limitations within our current curriculum were different, the participating faculty with the exception of one would be willing to incorporate *new* curriculum ideas. The most significant finding is that the participating faculty feels that they can contribute and encourage new behavior in peer and student engagement to cultivate creativity and originality in their own and others’ artwork. It is important that staff should be encouraged to see a culturally responsive approach as a shift in personal behavior and philosophy and not new content. Cultural responsiveness is not an art project, but a way in which you engage and promote creativity, original thought and honesty in class or studio. It is a way of life, not a lesson plan.

Significance of my Findings

Froebel (1887) wrote that “For what man tries to represent or do he begins to understand” (p. 76). The key to our staff becoming more culturally responsive was our truthful contribution in the journals, discussions, and in the process of our own art making; searching for meaning and

significance in personal memories, objects and visuals. One faculty member wrote, “I believe it has taught me to be more open minded on how students or just people receive information and that we should be aware and sensitive to their reactions as well”. I believe through my findings that this statement sums up the feelings and attitudes of the majority of the staff. My research shows that university faculty members have the potential to become more culturally responsive, in and out of the studio and more importantly, engage each other and consider this approach with students when necessary.

Recommendations

I would recommend this kind of initiative to members of any fine art faculty, whether primary, secondary, or university level. There is no better way of learning than to do and this research established that it is possible to change attitudes and behaviors through experiential learning, without having to *train* anyone. The initiative has proven to be personally beneficial to the artists and educators in our department, which ultimately transfers to how we all deal with each other and our students.

Future Plans

The faculty art exhibit brought others from our 120 person staff into the fold by creating a buzz about the meaning and reason behind the exhibit. My team and I are hosting a continuing education class in July 2013, which will allow more members of the campus faculty to participate in a smaller version of this staff development centered on material cultural and cultural responsiveness. This is exciting because it will give my team a chance to share their personal experiences about this initiative with people outside of the fine arts department. The artwork from the show was immediately picked up by a local gallery in Orlando, FL and will

hang until the end of June 2013. People have been so interested in the work that we have also been asked to host a show within the Central Florida, and open up the exhibition to participants in the community. The artwork will be hung in a Central Florida Gallery in downtown Orlando the month of September 2013, which all research participants have volunteered to contribute to again. This will also give us an opportunity to share some educational thoughts from the research with those outside of our university.

References

- Andrus, L. (2001). The culturally competent art educator. *Art Education*, 54(4), 14-19.
- Bolin, P. E., & Blandy, D. (2003). Beyond visual culture: Seven statements of support for material culture studies in art. *Studies in Art Education*, 44(3), 246-263. doi: 1321012
- Bolin, P. E., & Blandy, D. (2012). Looking at, engaging more: Approaches for investigating material culture. *The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 65(4), 40-46.
- Ferrance, E. (2000). *Action research*. Providence, RI: Brown University.
- Fleming, E. M. (1974). Artifact study: A proposed model. *Winterthur Portfolio*, 9, 153-173. doi: 1180572
- Froebel, F. (1887). *Education of man*. New York: Translated by W. N. Hailman (1896).
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice*. (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Glassie, H., & Truesdell, B. (2008). A life in the field: Henry Glassie and the study of material culture. *The Public Historian*, 30(4), 59-87. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>
- Gussin Paley, V. (1979). *White teacher*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Hicks, Dan 2010. The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect. In Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 25-98
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(4), 312-320
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: successful teachers of African American*

- children* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/journals>
- Lai, A. (2012). Culturally responsive art education in a global era. *The Journal of the National Art Education Association*, 65(5), 18-23.
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. (pp. 1-21). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2005). Backwards Design. *Understanding by design*. (2 ed., pp. 13- 34). Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- Powell, L. (2012). 30 Americans: An inspiration for culturally responsive teaching. *Art Education*, 65(5), 33-40.
- Prater, M. A., & Devereaux, T. H. (2009). Culturally responsive training for teacher educators. *Action in Teacher Education*, 31(3), 19-27. Retrieved from <http://education.byu.edu/ellsymposium/documents/highered.pdf>
- Prown, J. D. (1982). Mind in matter: An introduction to material culture theory and method. *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17(1), 1-19. doi: 1180761
- Richards, H. V., Brown, A. F., & Forde, T. B. U.S. Department of Education, The National Center for Culturally Educational Systems. (2006). *Addressing diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy*. Retrieved from: www.nccrest.org
- Rose, M. (2012). "object lesson": Using family heirlooms to engage students in art history. *Art Education*, 65(4), 47-51.

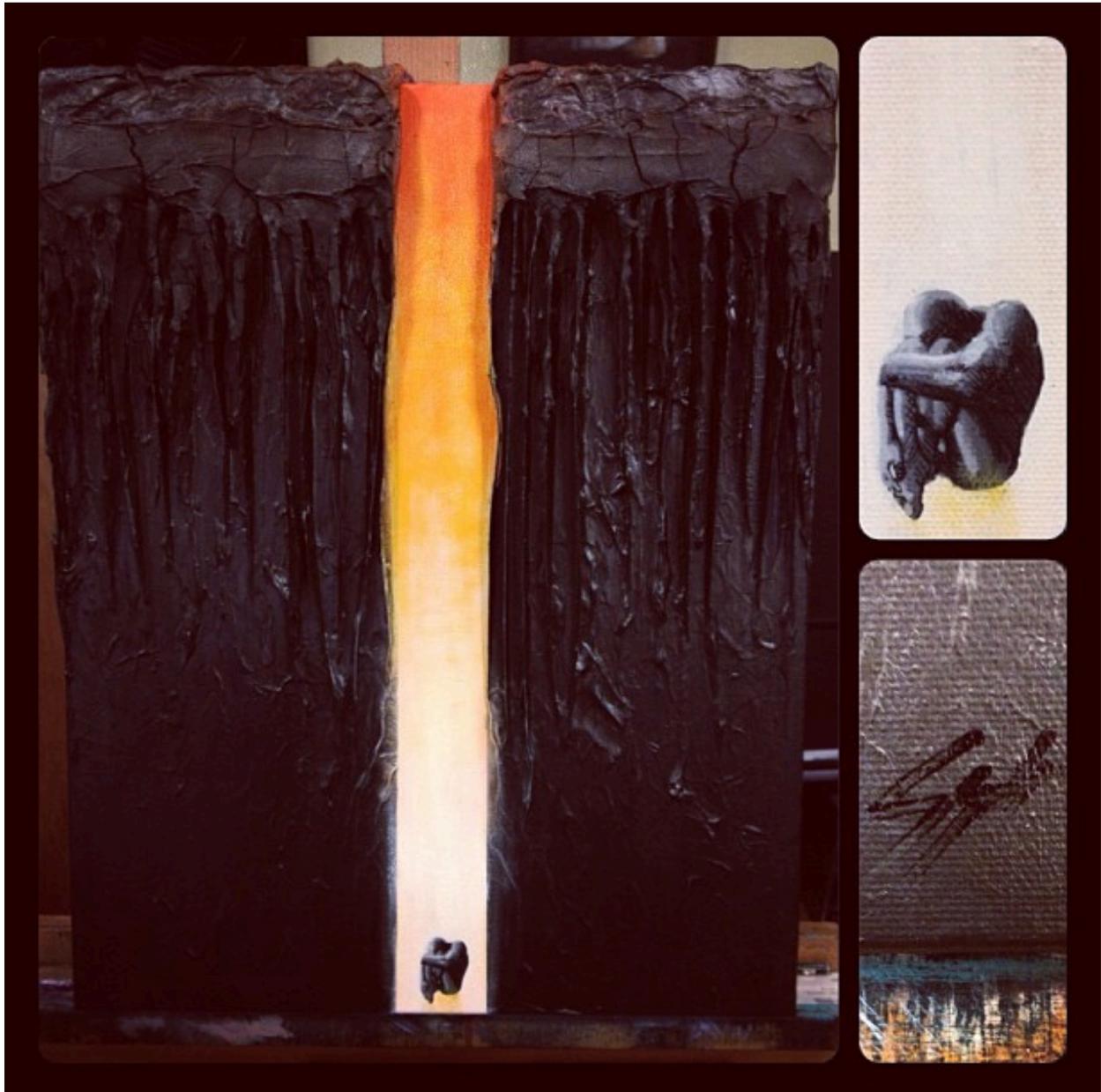
Appendix A Readings

1. “Culturally Responsive Art Education in a Global Era” by Alice Lai
2. “Looking At, Engaging More: Approaches for investigating Material Culture” by Doug Blandy and Paul Bolin
3. “Object Lesson: Using Family Heirlooms to Engage Students in Art History by Marice Rose,
4. “Art as a Social Practice: Exploring the Contemporary” by Maria D Leake
5. “Introducing Charly Palmer: Tar Baby and Culturally Responsive Teaching” by Tanisha Jackson.

Appendix B
Images of Faculty Artwork



Artist #1
Woody and Fish, in Alaska 2013
Acrylic on board



*Artist #3
What Was, 2013
Multi-media on canvas*



*Artist #8
Cock of Bachelos, 2013
Watercolor and other*



Artist #2
Fragments on Millstreet, 2013
Acrylic on canvas



Artist #5
The Immortal Branch, 2013
Acrylic on canvas



*Artist #8
Barrel Man, 2013
Ink on paper*



Artist #9
The Journey of Life, 2013
Acrylic on canvas



*Artist #7
Family Dinner, 2013
Acrylic, pastel and taco wrappers on canvas*



Paul King '13

*Artist #10
Cactus Clam, 2013
Watercolor and ink on paper*



*Artist #11
Traitor, 2013
Multimedia on board*



*Artist #6
Consider It, 2013
Acrylic on wood*



*Artist #12
Still Life, 2013
Acrylic on board*

Author Biography

Holly was born into a military family and spent her time all over the United States from Colorado to Alabama, but spent her formative years in Florida. She received her Bachelors of Science in Art Education from Florida State University in 1993. Holly began her teaching experience in 1990 when she was hired to consult in a language arts class in an elementary school and continued to work there until her graduation, She moved to Orlando, Florida to teach art at a residential treatment facility for ages 5-18 and this experience led her to her next five years working with Emotionally Disabled students in the public school system. Holly's final job within the public school system was spent as an art teacher and curriculum writer at an arts and communication magnet middle school. She left the public school system to pursue her interests in painting and photography and spent the time traveling overseas and around the country for inspiration. She has been involved in the Central Florida arts and cultural scene, and has been showing and selling her artwork since 1998 (<http://www.thehollyblossom.com>). For the last eleven years Holly has been working at Full Sail University in the 3D Arts programs and has held four positions. She is currently the department chair of fine arts for both Computer Animation and Game Art. Holly has been fortunate enough to work as an art director on animation shorts and eBooks and is currently working on a new illustration program for the university.