A CERAMIC ART RESOURCE FOR THE ART EDUCATION CLASSROOM

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The purpose of this Project in Lieu of Thesis was to create a ceramic resource for art educators. My research focused on the use and development of ceramics in the art education classroom. I was motivated to create this resource due to the small number of comprehensive resources available for PreK-12 art teachers interested in using clay in the classroom. I formed a partnership with several art educators to determine their specific needs regarding incorporating clay usage into the art curriculum. With this information, as well as my own knowledge of the material and processes, I created a website to educate teachers in the ceramics arts. The website includes sections addressing the importance of clay as an art material, technical skills, use of clay in the classroom, proper kiln usage, enrichment, educational resources, contemporary artists, and a blog. In addition to the informative text, I have included photos, instructional videos, links to lessons, and potential
resources. The outcome is an informative, relevant, and easy-to-navigate website. This project is important to the field of art education because it will simplify what has been considered a time-consuming process that dissuades art educators from using clay. The website may be viewed at www.ohhappyclay.org.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I first experienced clay as a child walking along the shore of Lake Michigan. This material could have been easily mistaken for a rock. When I picked it up and pressed it into my hands, it moved and formed different shapes. I spent my days walking the beach and digging in the sand to find more of this material. When the clay was formed it was left to dry along the sea wall at my home. This magical experience during my childhood created a deep passion for the ceramic arts.

As a child, my experiences in art class were much different than the experiences I had at home. Art class was a neglected subject if it could even be considered a subject at all. In middle school, the uncle of one of the girls in my class would sometimes come on Friday for a thirty-minute art lesson. It averaged out to maybe once or twice a month. I remember only one experience with clay in school during all of middle school, and I have no memory of being able to keep the piece I created. The experience involved rolling, flattening, and fastening little balls of clay to one another to create a tall vessel that I had hoped would hold flowers. With clay, it seemed I had the potential to make anything. However, in art class I felt restricted; I was rarely given the opportunity to work with clay and was often only provided two-dimensional art materials.
I am passionate about the use of ceramic arts in the PreK-12 art classroom. Clay can be a frustrating material causing art educators to question the value of the material. Cultivating true appreciation and understanding for the visual arts requires proving students with opportunities to explore and experiment with a variety of art forms, including those that are three-dimensional as well as two-dimensional. Studio Potter (1988) suggested that, clay has been overlooked as a valuable educational medium. There are many individuals who understand the value of clay and advocate its use. Art educators Wackowiak and Clements (2001) state:

“All Children, both in elementary and middle school, should have the opportunity to create and express their ideas in clay. Clay is a hands-on wonder-sensuous, malleable, unpredictable, and on occasion, messy. Some students respond to clay more enthusiastically than others, but all children benefit from the unique challenges provided by this gift from Mother Earth” (p. 356).

Using clay as an art material gives students the opportunity to create in a three-dimensional space with additive and/or subtractive methods of building. Objects are created in the round, meaning that can be viewed and built from every side. Smilansky (1988) suggests that three-dimensional art, unlike drawing, allows for concepts of space to be realistically depicted. Golomb (2004) supports use of clay based on its ability to create depth without the skills needed in two-
dimensional mediums to represent the illusion of the third dimension.

**Statement of the Problem**

In the PreK-12 art classroom there is a need for additional opportunities in the ceramic arts for both students and teachers. There is a large population of PreK-12 art teachers who lack the knowledge and resources to effectively and confidently use clay as an art material. Students are often limited in exposure, or worse, not given the opportunity to experience working in clay. Using clay in the classroom is a valuable experience. This project is focused around the lack of comprehensive information available to educators who desire to use clay as an art material. I have searched the Web and found limited clay resources accessible to teachers. In many cases, websites are outdated with broken and missing links.

*My research aimed to discover how I could make ceramics more accessible to art educators.* Questions I investigated were: What does a ceramic resource need to include? Why is clay a valuable material to be used in the art classroom? How does the history of ceramics education affect today’s art education?

This project focused on fulfilling the specific needs of the PreK-12 art educator with a basic understanding of clay. Providing the knowledge, skills, and resources to incorporate clay in the classroom. PreK-12 art teachers who desire to use
clay and increase their knowledge of the ceramic arts often question problems they face when using clay in the classroom. These questions helped guide my research. Specific questions included but were not limited to: understanding the usage of various tools and supplies, general kiln knowledge, and trouble shooting the issues of pieces becoming damaged or destroyed during firing.

These questions led me to build a website resource with information about techniques, clay in the classroom, proper kiln usage, enrichment, and educational resources. This site promotes the use of clay through written explanations, photographs, and videos.

**Significance of the Project**

Many PreK-12 art educators choose not to use clay as an art material because they lack the knowledge or do not have adequate resources to guide them. This project is important to the field of art education because as we advance in the art of technology, historical craft practices are left behind. It is of great importance that children are given the opportunity to form clay as they learn about the representation of objects. This helps them to better understand three-dimensional space.

A Web inventory was conducted to record the type of and quality of resources that currently exist. This research revealed that sources are not compiled in a single location and
thus, are not easily accessible. Without the knowledge to search for the proper terms, research is a tedious process. This project is significant because it provides art educators with a comprehensive resource that did not previously exist. It brings together information that facilitates the use of clay in a clear and concise manner. It bridges the gap in knowledge of the ceramic arts to bring clay into the PreK-12 art classroom.

**Project Overview**

Students should be given the opportunity to use clay as an art material during their education. The purpose of this project was to make ceramics more accessible to art educators by providing them with the proper information and guidance.

The development of the website resource began with a desire to create a one-stop resource that provided the basic information needed to use, fire, and glaze ceramics. This project aimed to find out what resources educators need to use clay in the classroom. I worked in partnership with art educators from around the United States to develop the content of the website.

Diana Faris, the current Senior Key Accounts Manager at the America Art Clay Company (AMACO) facilitated the development of the sections on safety and tools. She works closely with teachers to help provide the correct materials for using clay in
the classroom. She has developed lesson plans and teaches ceramic workshops all over the country.

Nancy Wilde is an elementary school teacher at Ochwilla Elementary School in the Putnam County School District, Hawthorne, Florida. While pursuing her PHD at the University of Florida researching joy and excitement in learning, Nancy found that within her classroom the arts bring pleasure to learning. Nancy said, “Four years ago, because of mandated testing, art, music, dance and theatre were eliminated. Last year the county received a grant that included art in an after school program.” The school had appropriate facilities and a functioning kiln. Nancy needed guidance on how to implement clay projects. Here are a few of her questions: What is the difference between earthenware and stoneware? What kind of clay should I use and what cone number do I order? How thick should their project be? How do we store unused clay? Can the bottom of the project be painted? Should we order lead-free glazes? What cone glaze do I order? What tools should I order?

Nicki Leatherwood a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin focused on painting and photography. She is currently an elementary art educator in the Austin Independent School District. Without much experience in clay, Nicki still attempted projects with her students but was faced with disappointment when pieces exploded in the kiln. She wanted to
know specifics about the kiln and firing to prevent this from happening in the future.

I posted an inquiry on the site Art Education 2.0 in an attempt to promote awareness of my project and gain some interest. Two significant contacts were created through this site. The first is Trista Meisner, an art educator at the International School of Bangkok. Trista was curious to see the content of the website. She said, “This is actually something I’ve been looking for the past several weeks and was disappointed to find that a well-maintained and resourceful site did not exist.” She is currently working with two classes in three-dimensional art. They already learned some basic clay processes and are completing the term by making a clay video on a process of their choice.

Lorian Dean, an art educator who was interested in my blog, is currently pursuing her MA in Liberal Arts in Teaching for Artistic Behavior. Her own artistic practice is focused on painting and drawing, but she is interested in learning about clay. Forming partnerships with art educators answered my research question while guiding the content to be included in the website.

Examination of the history of ceramics education and the value of working with clay guided my research. Extensive ceramic research and the partnerships mentioned above, helped
established the appropriate content for the website. Through this research, I created *Oh Happy Clay*, a ceramic website and blog aimed to make ceramics more accessible to art educators. *Oh Happy Clay* is a resource that contains basic ceramic introduction, process photographs, and how-to videos.
My review of literature included texts in art education, ceramics, and child development in clay. My research was focused on developing appropriate content for the website resources as well as the historical developments of ceramic education and the value of clay. I also reviewed ceramic websites and resources that are currently available on the Internet.

**Historical Context**

The first influences in ceramics art education were Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel. Hill (1988) states that both believed in a sensory education and used clay to increase students’ development and understanding. Froebel specifically focused on the identity of the individual, and used clay as a means of expression. He believed expression through art-making was more valuable than expression with words. Froebel’s ideas arrived in America at the onset of manual training in schools. Clay modeling was the activity of choice because of the malleable quality of the material and the sensory experiences that could be explored. Clay was used for several purposes, including promotion of dexterity, sensory learning, and in combination with other subjects to advance learning.

Early progressive educators valued Froebel’s ideas, and schools included clay in the curriculum. Clay was still considered an important medium until the onset of the American
Arts and Crafts Movement in 1980 when individuality lost some of its value in art education, and to some, clay was even considered an unsafe material.

Griffith (1958) suggests that during the 1800’s, American art and ceramics specifically felt inferior to other countries’ art and design, and thus, began a movement in the United States industrial arts. In 1870, American schools in Massachusetts hired Walter Smith to come over from England to help direct the school art programs. Hill (1988) stated that at this time art was focused on serving the need of industry; Smith implemented clay and drawing programs in the public school system.

As America grew as a country, trades and skills began to improve. Ceramics as an advanced science did not come to America at its beginning; it took many years of research. It took time and energy to develop skills, techniques, and the understanding of the materials available in the land. America had potteries that were producing functional wares but they were not regarded as highly as the imported wares, from England. There are some discrepancies in who started the first pottery in America. Griffith (1958) suggests that the first pottery was started in Jamestown, Virginia. Hill (1988) believes that by the late 1800’s potteries were beginning to surface. He documents the first in Cincinnati under the direction of Louise McLaughlin and Maria Longworth Nichols. Their classifications for pottery may
be different, causing for the significant differences in dates and locations.

Ceramics education had a place in America’s public schools long before making its way to the university. It was because of the competition with England that the United States chose to advance the ceramics arts. Ohio State University was the first to have a ceramics program, but it was focused on ceramics engineering. In the early 1900’s, ceramics programs began to appear throughout the United States. Charles Binns was very important in the development of ceramics. He helped start the first ceramic arts college, Alfred University (Formally New York State School of Clay Working). Binns was a leader in American ceramics and took on the challenge of educating others (Hill 1988 & Griffith 1958).

**The Value in Clay**

Over time the value of clay in America’s schools has changed. It started with Froebel’s interest in sensory learning and nonverbal expression that lead to the development of knowledge and ideas. At the time, people believed that art was able to develop moral and ethical behavior. A growing desire for aesthetics developed the idea of art for art’s sake. Later there was a switch to an emphasis on vocational skills.

Today a new argument needs to be made for the value of working with clay. Brown (1975, 1984), one of the first
researchers of child development in clay, attempted to discover changes that took place in children’s development through sculpture. At the conclusion of the first study, she encouraged educators to use clay in the classroom and begin its use at a young age. At the time of her second study, her findings did not conclude anything more than the first, suggesting educators are not listening to research and still avoid using clay in the classroom.

Golomb (2004) suggests the importance of clay as an art material. Clay can be formed in the round; attention can be given to all sides of the object being sculpted. It is different from drawing a two-dimensional surface that can only create the illusion of space, depth, and form and can never reproduce the world in a direct way. Golomb (2004) conducted two studies, one with 300 hundred students, the other with 109, in which participants were asked to create a sculptural representation of figures. She evaluated them based on posture, attention to multiple sides, and the manner the material was used. She discovered a difference in child development between the two-dimensional drawings and three-dimensional sculptures. One specific example states, "compared with the drawn human figure, the trend in modeling is toward an earlier differentiation of the trunk as a separate structure" (Golomb, 2002, p. 58). Golomb suggests that the conceptual development in working with clay is

Ash (2000) suggests that sculpture is a neglected discipline and supports the use of clay because of its unique ability to activate the senses in a way that two-dimensional work cannot. He encourages the active participation of the viewer and creator of three-dimensional work.

Teachers and researchers advocate the use of clay for many different reasons ranging from sensory learning to developing cognitive and affective skills for learning. Meng (2002) and Hack (2009) have found that their students are enthusiastic, eager, and enjoy learning when working with clay. Walkup (2005) supports it for the enjoyment of the teacher and student, and Warick (2005) for the scientific knowledge that can be gained. Similansky, Hagan, and Lewis (1988) conducted a field-based research project with 1,600 children using clay in the classroom. The results support the notion that clay can promote the development of learning skills and allows for a different type of representation than drawing offers. Their book provides everything from teaching strategies to managing clay in the classroom.
In conclusion, Hill (1988) argues that historical evidence does support the value of clay as a medium for expression but that further research is needed to support its use in the classroom. Hill suggests, “Reviving the progressive argument for handwork in clay modeling could provide what is needed” (p. 189). Golomb has taken these ideas one step further, but additional research is needed to support the use of clay in the classroom.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this project was to make ceramics more accessible to PreK-12 art educators. With this goal in mind, a Web-based ceramic resource and blog was created. The Internet provided the availability that I was looking for. The blog included current information for example the first post mentioned the February 2012 issue of Arts & Activities that was primarily focused on clay. Two instructional videos showing how to apply kiln wash and how to reclaim clay were included as part of my website to visually demonstrate necessary processes for the classroom. Monica Patterson, a current MA Art Education graduate student at the University of Florida filmed the videos. She then taught me to edit the videos using Final Cut Pro®. The videos and the blog are integral to the success of the website. I linked sections of the website to Pinterest boards that I created with relevant information and links. The website stores the main content and technical information needed to understand and use clay in the classroom.

To accomplish the goal of making ceramics accessible, art educators were interviewed to determine what type of information would be more valuable and useful. Using their questions as guidance in deciding what content would be appropriate. I decided to create a website using WordPress.org because I was able to upload a chosen theme at no cost. WordPress does not
host the site, so I had to find an outside host. I chose Hostgator because they came highly recommended, and my domain name was purchased through Network Solutions.

The website is focused on specific content that helps create an understanding of materials and guides educators through processes in ceramics. Going beyond technical content, I created an interactive and easy navigate site using the feature theme from Moon Themes. What emerged was Oh Happy Clay, located at www.ohhappyclay.org. The feature theme provided a clean and easy-to-navigate website (Figure 3-1). Marisa Falcigno, a MFA
Graphic Design major at the University of Florida provided guidance in the development of designing the website. We worked together to upload the theme into WordPress while making specific adjustments. Lydia Challenger, a senior Photography major at the University of Florida, took photographs to supplement the content of the website.

The website includes the following categories: clay, technical skills, clay in the classroom, kiln, enrichment, educational resources, contemporary artists, and a link to the blog. The information to create each section was gathered after deciding which categories to include. The section on Clay provides an introduction to the material, how it is formed, and the different types of clay (Figure 3-2). Each section includes a bibliography and recommended readings to guide the reader to further research. The section on clay also includes a subsection on Why Clay is a valuable material to be used in education.
The section on Technical Skills gives the reader a basic introduction of ceramic techniques. These techniques include Handbuilding, Wheel-throwing, Molds, Glazing, Surface, and Image Transfer (Figure 3-3). Each section is linked to a PDF that can be downloaded. It is important that these files are downloaded, as PDF’s to preserve the integrity of the project.
The section on Clay in the Classroom provides an introduction to the preparations that need to be made before using clay in the classroom (Figure 3-4). It includes sections on Materials, Tools, Ceramic Suppliers, Classroom Setup, Safety, and Reclaiming Clay. The Materials section explains the different types of clay bodies, which are earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain. It also gives recommendations for clay and glazes for classroom use. The Tools section provides photographs, descriptions, and links to tools used in ceramics.
The ceramics suppliers section links directly to Pinterest, where a variety of ceramic suppliers from all over the United States are listed. *Classroom Setup* provides a brief recommendation for the arrangement of the classroom while working with clay. The *Safety* section highlights the importance of safety in the art classroom when using clay and firing the kiln. The last section is *Reclaiming Clay*. It includes instructions on the basics of reclaiming clay in the form of a video that was originally posted on Vimeo. It is available at [www.vimeo.com/38817031](http://www.vimeo.com/38817031) (Figure 3-5).
The kiln is a very important part of using clay in the classroom. There is an entire section dedicated to the Kiln. It includes the Clay in the Kiln, What is a Kiln, Cones and Firing Temperatures, Kiln Preparation and Care, and How to Fire a Kiln. The opening page has a diagram from the Skutt Kiln Manual as well as vocabulary (Figure 3-6). The section on Clay in the Kiln details what happens to the clay as it is fired. What is a Kiln? links directly to a PDF that outlines the difference between electric and atmospheric kilns and the different atmospheres that can create oxidation and reduction. Photos of the different
kilns are included. Electric kilns are more commonly found in the art education classroom, therefore photos of both programmable and manual electric kilns are shown. Specific images correlate with each type of kiln. The section on Cones and Firing Temperatures explains what a cone is and how it functions in the kiln. There are included links to the Orton cone chart and a firing chart from Ceramic Arts Daily. Kiln Preparation and Care links directly to a PDF with specific directions for preparing an electric kiln for firing. It provides instructions on starting, loading, caring for the kiln, and a link to the second video on applying kiln wash posted on Vimeo. The last kiln section outlines How to Fire a Kiln. It includes both bisque and low-fire glaze firing schedules for programmable and manual kilns.
The *Enrichment* section was created in an effort to gather relevant educational experiences available beyond traditional education (Figure 3-7). This includes *Organizations*, *Ceramics Enrichment Opportunities*, and *Student Opportunities*. The section on *Organizations* is linked to Pinterest where I include organizations and web-based groups that support the use of clay in the classroom. *Ceramics Enrichment* includes links to art and craft schools and artist’s residencies.
The section *Educational Resources* simplifies the abundance of ceramic resources available on the Web and in print (Figure 3-8). It includes links to *Lesson Plans, Ceramic Vocabulary, Books, Magazines, and Art Museums*. A board on Pinterest links websites with specific lesson plans that are of interest. A list of ceramic vocabulary that can be used in the classroom is provided in this section. There is also a link to recommended look books (image based books) and resource books that would be valuable for the classroom. The *Magazines* section also links to Pinterest, where ceramic magazines from several different
countries are cited. There is also a link to a Pinterest board that focuses on Art Museums that have a significant ceramics collection.

Figure 3-8 Educational Resources

My board on Pinterest provides links to Contemporary Ceramic Artists working with different materials and techniques. This board is a resource for both teachers and the students. The board can be viewed at

http://pinterest.com/jenigard/contemporary-ceramic-artists/

(Figure 3-9).
Lastly, a blog supplements the content and information provided on the website. It provides a platform for sharing the current and ever-changing experience of ceramics. The blog was originally available at www.ohhappyclay.blogspot.com (Figure 3-10) and can now be found at www.gardclaystudios.blogspot.com.
Figure 3-10 Oh Happy Clay Blog
CHAPTER 4: REFLECTIONS

The goal of this project was to make ceramics more accessible to PreK-12 art educators by creating a website resource that includes text, videos, Pinterest boards, photographs, and an accompanying blog. Different ideas about the content surfaced throughout the process based on my research and exchanges with partnering art educators.

I originally planned to create videos with one or two takes and use a simple video-editing program. After filming the videos, it was evident that the task was going to be greater then I had anticipated. I worked with Monica Patterson to edit the videos using Final Cut Pro. The program allows one to import individual clips and assign them names. The advantage in using this program is that one can unlink the video and audio as you import them to use close-up views from the camera and sound from a different clip, creating smooth transitions from one clip to the next.

When preparing to setup the website, I used The Non-Designer Web Book written by Williams and Tollett (2006) as a guide. After researching WordPress themes, I decided the best choice, would be to use WordPress.org to build my site. I have the option to change the theme if appropriate.

The development of the website, revealed that while it would provide content, it would not connect me to the visitor
and reader. A blog share current, relevant information as well as creates a platform for sharing and interaction. The website is designed as pages without an option to post or respond. The blog is open to comments and frequent inquires about blog posts fill my inbox. The blog created a personal connection that I did not anticipate.

Clay is a valuable material. Many educators face the challenge of not knowing how to properly use clay as an art material. My project has made ceramics more accessible to PreK-12 art educators through an interactive website that provides detailed information on ceramic processes, proper kiln usage, enrichment, and classroom resources. In conclusion, while clay may be a messy material, it offers many advantages in learning. Understanding a three-dimensional space offers students the opportunity to develop skills in creativity, cognitive and affective skills for learning, sensory learning, and leads to a different understanding of the world closer to the actual three-dimensional world we live in.

**Future Direction**

In the future, the specific direction I take may include updating my website with lesson plans, how-to videos, sections on photographing work, ceramics history, and a section on adapting lessons for special needs. It would be beneficial to include grade-level specific information. I plan to continually
work with educators to update my website content through conversations and interviews. I intend to continue posting current ceramics information on the blog keeping an open communication with readers.
References


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeni Hansen was born and raised in West Michigan, the state that resembles a mitten. She grew up living in a Bed & Breakfast that her parents still own and operate on the Lake Michigan shoreline. Jeni’s mother was a nurse and her father was a teacher. She was always a very energetic child who enjoyed playing with clay and doing cartwheels anywhere she could. After graduating from high school in 2003, Jeni attended Hope College to pursue a degree in Art Education with an emphasis in ceramics. After completing her undergraduate work, she taught at the secondary level serving as a high school art teacher, yearbook teacher, newspaper advisor, and cheerleading coach.

She is currently a graduate student at the University of Florida and has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant since 2010. She teaches the lab component to “Art for the Elementary School Teacher,” which is a course designed for Elementary Education majors. She has been an active member in multiple organizations including National Art Education Association (NAEA), Handbuilt or Wheel Thrown Clay (H.O.T. Clay), and Arts and Health.

Her fiancé Forrest Gard, is pursuing his MFA in Ceramics at Louisiana State University. They will marry June 2012 and look forward to their life together that will always be surrounded by the wonderful messiness of clay!