

AN INVITATION TO REIMAGINE: ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE HIGH
SCHOOL ART CLASSROOM

By

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Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Sanders-Bustle', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Lynn Sanders-Bustle, Major Professor

A handwritten date '6-8-2017' in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Date

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Under the Direction of Dr. Lynn Sanders-Bustle

ABSTRACT

This action research study aims to understand how high school visual art students interact and engage with social justice topics. With support from social justice art education literature and critical pedagogy theory, I examined how students engaged in art-making through lessons designed to address the topics of identity and social justice. After analysis of student artwork and written reflections, field notes and analytical memos, I discovered: ways students grapple with meaning making, the changing of students' perceptions on art and social justice towards a view of art as a vehicle for connecting personal experience to social issues, and considerations for art educators on positioning themselves in social justice pedagogy.

WORDS: Social justice art education, Critical pedagogy

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my hard-working and selfless parents. Mama and Baba, you've both have been an example to me of dedication and strength. I know I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for the stepping stones you have both laid. I would also like to dedicate this to my baby sister, Karen. I believe in you as much as you believe in me.

Thank you for everything; with love, this is for all of you.

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Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Last fall, marked my first time teaching my own visual art classes at a recently-opened, suburban high school. I was also a part-time graduate student, enrolled in courses such as Multicultural Art Education and Diversity in Creativity. Through the coursework, my position and influence as an art educator were challenged. Also, my perspectives on art education and pedagogy transformed as I began to consider social justice's place in art and school. During my studies, an unexpected incident occurred at the school where I currently teach. Racial tensions rose as a white student made racially-charged remarks against black students at school using social media. In response, students participated in peaceful protests in support of *Black Lives Matter*. *Black Lives Matter* is an activist movement campaigning against police brutality towards Black-Americans as a result of the 2012 acquittal of George Zimmerman who was charged with murdering Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager (Black Lives Matter, 2017). Since then, the movement has mobilized further dialogue about racial injustices and systematic oppression occurring in Black-American communities. When my high school's students participated in the movement, I witnessed firsthand that social justice is relevant and personal to the students we teach. As my present teaching experiences and the critical practices learned in graduate school merged, I wondered where was social justice's place in the art classroom and how would my high school students engage in creating artworks and learning about art that mobilizes social change?

With the current social climate of the world and specifically the United States reaching high levels of tension, oppression, and injustice, it is a challenging time to be an educator and a student. Students are growing up in an environment of social and political tension and upheaval.

Alter-Muri (2004) posits that the tools and methods students need to critically process their thoughts and feelings about the world can be found in art education. Social justice art education helps students critique and reflect on the social issues of the world through the process of art-making. This process encourages students to connect their personal experiences to their social landscape and provides them opportunities to critique and create meaning and knowledge. My hopes for this study was to learn how to facilitate a transformational learning environment and create a curriculum founded on critical art education pedagogy that would help support students in addressing the prominent issues that prevail in their lives and the world they live.

Statement of Purpose

In this action research study, I taught and observed high school students who attended an advanced art class at a suburban public high school in the Southern United States and analyzed their written responses and artworks in order to understand how they respond and interact with social justice topics and issues in the art classroom.

Research Questions

1. How do students interact and engage with social justice topics and issues in an art classroom?
2. What do students learn when social justice is integrated into the art classroom?
3. How should art educators position themselves when implementing social justice art education?
 - 3a. What considerations should art educators make when implementing social justice art in the midst of school systems?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because there is a need for art educators to have a better understanding of how to implement social justice art education in schools. Social justice art education literature represents the practices of social justice art in K-12 schooling (Quinn, Ploof, & Hochtritt, 2012; Darts, 2006; Knight, 2006; Anderson et al., 2010; Powell & Serriere, 2013), but there are challenges and limitations art educators face as they implement social justice art education in their classrooms. This study hopes to provide another voice to the conversation about social justice art education in schools, primarily within public education, and impart a greater understanding of how art and art-making can resonate with and empower students.

Social justice art education's purpose is to provide students opportunities to critically examine and investigate areas of inequity within our society (Stewart, 2012; Maguire & Lenhian, 2010). As a result, students gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their social landscape, work towards social consciousness and become more civic-minded. Engaging students in social justice art is possible through a lens of meaningful and critical pedagogy. Henry Giroux (2011) states that for there to be a democratic and meaningful pedagogy, educators must be "willing to connect pedagogy with the problems of public life, a commitment to civic courage and the demands of social responsibility" (p. 6). Social justice art education becomes a critical asset in public education as students' grow in their understanding of how to engage with institutions of disrepair by connecting art-making with social justice.

Chapter Two: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The prevalence of social justice art education literature has been on the rise since the early 2000s. Its importance was reflected in the 2010 National Art Education Association's conference theme (Castro & Funk, 2016). Art educators and scholars have continually investigated and advocated for an art pedagogy that invites social change (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Beyerbach & Davis, 2011; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Dewhurst, 2014). This review aims to discuss the definition, practices (particularly those in K-12 settings), challenges, and rationale for social justice art education. The literature included also focuses on critical pedagogy in the field of art education and offers valuable experiences and reflections shared by scholars as they put social justice art education into practice. The methodologies and implementations discussed in this literature review emerge from reoccurring themes in social justice art practice. These themes provide a framework for current art educators interested in using art for social change.

Defining Social Justice Art Education

For many years, art educators and scholars have advocated for the use of art as an expression of life and a vehicle for social reconstruction (Lanier, 1969; Freedman, 2000; Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Dewhurst, 2014; McFee, 2016). Art educators desired to challenge the modernist view of creating art for art's sake (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005) and viewed art as a medium for students to engage and connect with their experiences and their place in the world and society (Stewart, 2012; Albers, 1999; Maguire & Lenihan, 2010). Art educators also considered the transformative quality of art and believed that artistic works could "not only have the power to transform the creator...but also transform the

larger social context within which the creator and the works exist” (Holloway & Krensky, 2001, p.355-356).

The definition of social justice art education is often debated amongst art educators and scholars, as there are competing perspectives. Social justice art education is defined as a process in which learners create works of art that bring awareness, attempt to intervene and encourage mobilization of action towards systems of inequality and injustice (Dewhurst, 2010; Maguire & Lenihan, 2010). Social justice art education is derived from social justice pedagogy which encourages educators to practice the following principles:

(1) attend to social relations in the classroom, (2) use reflection, (3) foster student-centered learning, (4) value awareness, personal growth and change, (5) balance emotional and cognitive components of learning, and (6) acknowledge and seek to transform the ways in which identity-based social position and power shapes participant interactions in the classroom and everyday contexts. (Beyerbach & Davis, 2011, p.7)

Campana (2011) suggests that this kind of pedagogy brings about empowerment and gives rise to social and political consciousness for all involved. In social justice art education, students are given the opportunity to analyze and connect to social issues that inspire critically and motivate the creation of art aiming to shift current realities (Dewhurst, 2014; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Stewart, 2012). Students’ voices and lives become integrated into the curriculum as they gain further understanding of their identity, community, and their role in society (Garber 2004; Albers, 1999; Stuhr 2003).

Dewhurst (2010) suggests three considerations to take into account when identifying the values of social justice art education. These include, “how strategic the artistic and activist

decisions are in relation to their potential to effectively change policy, what constitutes activism or social change and if emphasis is placed on the process or the product of artmaking” (Dewhurst, 2010, p.7). With social justice art education founded on student-centered pedagogy, most social justice art studies considered Dewhurst’s (2010) questions through the lens of the needs and the interests of the participating students. In most studies, art educators focused on the process of having students create artworks where social topics are critically analyzed and reflected upon as opposed to the final art product (Miner, 2013; Dewhurst, 2010; Anderson et al., 2010; Stuhr, 2003; Knight, 2006).

Lastly, social justice art education manifests itself in a variety of art practices which take place in school and community settings. Different art practices fall under the social justice art umbrella such as social practice art, activist art, public art, art for social change, and community-based arts (Dewhurst, 2014). The broad range of social justice conceptualizations is due to socially varied motivations arising from issues and contexts involving race and multicultural studies, feminist studies, identity studies, disability rights, and environmentalism—just to name a few and the attention contemporary artists pay to these issues in their work (Garber, 2004). There are also common themes in social justice pedagogy such as democracy, history, self-awareness, activism, imagination, social literacy and public space (Anderson, Gussak, Hallmark & Paul, 2010). The breadth of themes is indicative of social justice art education’s comprehensive and interdisciplinary nature and its applicability to a wide range of contexts.

Social Justice Pedagogy in Art Education

Pinpointing methods of social justice pedagogy that apply across different contexts is a challenge for social justice implementation. (Dewhurst, 2014; McArdle et al., 2013). Though pedagogical practices for social justice pedagogy differ and are adjusted according to each

unique context, there are foundational practices associated with social justice art education pedagogy. These practices will be discussed in this section. They are derived from social justice art practices implemented in a variety of settings, with a focus on how social justice is implemented in schools. The practices include co-constructed and student-centered teaching, the critique of visual culture, scaffolding, and reflection and critical inquiry.

Co-constructed and Student-Centered Teaching

Social justice art education derives its practice from critical pedagogy and focuses on the co-construction of knowledge amongst participating educators and learners. Paulo Freire (1968), an educator and supporter of critical pedagogy, advocated for co-constructed learning:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it (p.80).

In co-constructed learning, the educator/facilitator provides the structure and support needed to give students autonomy. Then the educator/facilitator fades into the background, allowing for students to investigate and construct their own knowledge (Green et al., 2013). Through this process, educators step down from the position of being 'truth providers' to become facilitators of student inquiry (Campana, 2011). Co-constructed learning works in contrast to what Freire (1968) labeled as a 'banking' system of education where teachers 'deposit'

knowledge into their students, the ‘depositories’ (p. 72). It is through this process that students passively accept the knowledge given and teachers are placed in positions of authority.

This shift in power and a need for reciprocity and collaboration amongst all participants impacts the creation and planning of the classroom curriculum. It is suggested that educators practicing social justice art education should not rely on textbook or formulaic curriculums (Powell & Serriere, 2013, Dewhurst, 2010). The curriculum should be adjusted to include and consider the interest, needs, and experiences of the students while maintaining a social justice perspective (Garber, 2004; Dewhurst, 2010; Powell & Serriere, 2013). The learning experience becomes fluid and responsive, where educators must pay attention to their students’ work and progress to reflect on what lessons and experiences would benefit their students. In *Art for Social Justice* (Anderson et al., 2010), a book of essays and studies on social justice art practice, a K-8 art educator shares her process in creating curriculum for social justice art:” As I observe my student’s words and work, they change my teaching process and my thinking. I hold my own narrative lightly as I adjust my lesson plans and expectations accordingly” (p.134). As this art educator works with students on topics such as child labor and their school’s culture, she allows her students to interrupt her authoritative position by providing opportunities for students to lead the pathway of learning and by adjusting her planned curriculum to fit the context of the classroom.

Along with the co-construction of knowledge, social justice art education utilizes student-centered learning. For social justice art education to be student-centered, there must also be a connection between learning and art-making and students’ identities, interests, and experiences. John Dewey (1938) claimed that for learning to be meaningful and to prepare students as socially-aware citizens, it must be linked to the students’ experiences. Dewey proposed that

human experience should not be alienated in schools, nor does it exist within a vacuum. Rather, educators should foster environments that provide experiences relevant to their students' interests. Educators should also consider their students' past experiences as they teach. In social justice art practice, opportunities must be provided for students to identify "the ways injustice plays out in the world and in relation to the artist's own life" (Dewhurst, 2010, p. 9). The curriculum should allow students to critically understand and investigate their cultural and sociopolitical identities (Maguire & Lenihan, 2010). When curriculum connects to students' identities and experiences, authentic and meaningful learning and art-making occur (Giroux, 2011; Dewhurst, 2014). For students to connect their art-making to personal experience and interest, the literature suggests that students be given the option to choose their social topics to research (Dewhurst, 2010; Stewart, 2012; Beyerbach & Davis, 2011). Giving students the independence to choose social topics of interest allows art educators to be facilitators as opposed to those who dictate what is learned. Students become informants of the curriculum. Garber (2014) states that, "in social justice education, student's interests, voices, and lives are now understood as part of the curriculum" (p. 6).

Visual Culture

Social justice art education requires students to recognize, understand and examine visual culture to effectively address social issues and topics through a visual means (Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Freedman, 2000). Visual culture is difficult to specify due to its inclusive nature, but Duncum (2001) attempts to define visual culture as visual artifacts produced or reproduced by systems and groups in society (p. 105). It is crucial for educators to understand how students interpret images and to encourage students to challenge and critique the visuals prominent in their lives and society. Without a critical and curious eye, students are left to

construct knowledge without understanding the context behind the images they see and leaving, at times, the dominant narrative, uninterrupted. (Freedman, 2000; Anderson et al., 2010).

Art educators (Quinn et al., 2012; Alter-Muri, 2004; Anderson et al., 2010; Beyerbach & Davis, 2011; Dewhurst, 2014; Darts, 2006) who have put social justice art into practice, cultivate an understanding of visual culture by helping their students critique how society and artists use images to convey certain meanings. David Darts (2006), a high-school art educator, prompted his students to look at everyday commercial images and objects, in his Contemporary Issues and the Visual Arts class where students created installation, performance and multimodal artworks concerning social issues. By interacting and connecting with visual culture, his students could “better recognize and understand the struggles we each participate in as we establish identities and make meaning from the constant play of cultural materials” (Darts, 2006, p.7). They also created more developed artwork as they understood and analyzed how visual artifacts inform their understanding of their identities and society. Other art educators have examined visual culture within their classrooms through discussion. In Albers (1999) ethnographic study of a 6th-grade classroom, she observed how the school’s art teacher facilitated a discussion about which artistic subject matter and colors they associated with a particular gender. Some students left the discussion with transformed beliefs that, “Just because they are male or female doesn't mean that they should or do think in a particular way” (Albers, 1999, p.10). Not all students left the discussion transformed, but they all left with a greater awareness of their beliefs and interpretation of images.

Another method of understanding the use of visual culture involves introducing students to contemporary artists. Desai and Chalmers (2007) suggest using contemporary art practices and artists as vehicles and inspiration for students to research and construct their knowledge through

art-making. Contemporary art makes connections to cultural and social contexts and proposes difficult questions that prompt necessary and democratic dialogue and participation (Donahue & Marshall, 2014). Students become involved with the complex and investigative process of art-making which allows them to gain new conceptual and visual knowledge (Gude, 2004). This contrasts with modernist art approaches which ask students to illustrate or analyze existing knowledge. Through critically viewing and understanding the artistic process and intent behind socially-engaged and activist art, students learn methods and tools to create their own art involving social change (Beyerbach & Davis, 2011; Anderson et al., 2010; Dewhurst, 2014). Dewhurst (2014) discusses how learning to interpret other artist's works, teaches students how to clearly convey messages in their own art:

An exploration of how other artists created artwork can open up new technical and conceptual avenues for one's own artmaking. Learning to read works of art by discussing the choices that artists have made in their work can help novice artists begin to build their artistic vocabulary and technical tool kit. The kind of exploration of other artists' work is particularly useful for understanding how art can have an impact on conditions of injustice. (pg.83)

Scaffolding Content

By providing students with the tools to create art for social change, art educators practicing social justice art in schools must also consider how to scaffold knowledge and experiences (Beyerbach & Davis, 2011; Anderson et al., 2010; Darts, 2006). As students navigate through the process of creating social justice art, educators must provide a curriculum that builds upon itself or scaffolds. Educational psychologist, Jerome Bruner, discovered that the acquisition of a skill or knowledge is a hierarchical process in which foundational skills are

combined into 'higher skills,' allowing the learner to complete more complex tasks than they were able to prior (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976, p.89-90). In this process, teachers also need to support the learner as they complete tasks that move past their prior knowledge and skills. Bruner (1976) coined this instructional process as scaffolding (p.90). When scaffolding, the educator acknowledges the knowledge students are coming into the classroom with and adjusts the curriculum to help build upon the students' prior knowledge.

Before students can participate in the production of social justice art, students must also be informed and knowledgeable about the issues they desire to address. In consideration of engaging with social justice, Anderson et al. (2010) state, "In order to interrupt something, you need to know what you are interrupting" (pg. 136). To scaffold content, art educators facilitate activities and opportunities for their students to make connections between prior knowledge and personal interests and research and investigate social topics. In past studies, art educators partnered with teachers in other subject areas to create interdisciplinary learning experiences. An example of this would be Anne Thulson's (Anderson et al., 2010) lesson, which focused on the colonization of Mesoamerica by the Spanish with a desire to interrupt the dominant narrative. Before beginning the actual art project, students were taught about the history and the cultures of those regions through studying primary sources with their general classroom teachers. Thulson also conducted mini studio projects, allowing students to examine Pre-Columbian pictographs and visual culture in order to learn the context behind the art and how to use similar images in their own artworks. These prior lessons and activities helped set the stage for art-making focused on social justice.

Reflection & Critical Inquiry

The need for critical reflection and inquiry is required in the process of social justice art. These processes work hand in hand as students navigate through social issues and topics. Students must have time for reflection to begin to identify the structures and the issues that produce inequality (Green et al., 2013; Dewhurst, 2014). As students reflect on the systems and issues of injustice, they should be encouraged to inquire further on these topics (Dewhurst, 2014). By combining reflection and inquiry, students begin to gain different perspectives and a greater understanding of the context and underlying powers of social issues. Through this process of critical reflection and inquiry, students begin to achieve what Freire (1968) calls ‘conscientização’ or conscientization, an awakening to the unjust societal realities and the move towards creative and considerate action to intervene these oppressive situations (p.109). This sense of consciousness and awareness provides students with a clearer vision for future action by assisting them in the organization and understanding of their intentions behind their artwork (Dewhurst, 2010). Darts (2006) described his high schoolers’ reflection as “reflective action” where their reflections on their research and learning became a catalyst for artistic and social action (p.9). To consider reflection as an active process is appropriate due to critical reflection and inquiry being an action of itself and a necessary action in social justice art (Freire, 1968).

Challenges of Social Justice Art Implementation in Schools

While investigating common practices in social justice art, one must consider the position and role of art educators and the challenges faced when implementing social justice art in schools. The relationship art educators have with schools is complex due to the social and power structures that affect and are supported by school systems (Campana, 2011). With these structures at work in public schools, art educators interested in implementing social justice education in their classrooms may have little impact on greater institutional injustices (McArdle,

Knight, & Stratigos, 2013; Stuhr, 2003). There are also art educators who hesitate to introduce social justice into their classrooms due to the structures in place. For example, a common belief by art educators is to follow the footsteps and practices of precedent art teachers, because these methods will inevitably become the standards and expectations for which they will be held accountable for (Stuhr, 2003). In *Art and Social Justice Education* (Quinn et al., 2012) an art educator reflects on the challenges in implementing social justice art at school and the need for educators to continue investigating and practicing social justice education:

While new ways of working with students that are based on the ideals of social justice are the goal, they come in direct confrontation with the institutions in which these relationships are played out. The pressures of ‘standards-based’ learning often do not allow enough time and latitude for change to occur organically. It is my hope that my professional fears won’t stop my own transformation nor those of other educators engaged in teaching the arts with a commitment to social justice. (pg. 135)

In response to these challenges, art educators must not be deterred from practicing social justice art education. Teaching art that works towards social change in school settings is possible and necessary. Although, art educators must exercise professional judgment and inform themselves on critical pedagogy and social justice practice to effectively implement social justice pedagogy in schools. There is also a need for individual teachers to form professional communities with other teachers to advocate for social justice education and work towards transforming the educational institutions in which they work (Garber, 2004).

Considerations for Art Educators & Facilitators

Students are not the only participants who must reflect during the process of social justice art. Art educators involved in social justice art practice must constantly reconsider and reflect on their role in the classroom. Art educators need to be aware of their beliefs, values, and perspectives that shape their classroom and the choices they make about the taught curriculum (Knight 2006; Maguire & Lenihan, 2010). They must also critically reflect on their experiences and perspectives through the lens of power, privilege, and inequity (Campana, 2011). In social justice pedagogy, the role of a teacher must transform from one that teaches prepackaged content to one that has the choice to create and direct a curriculum that empowers their students and expands and supports their students' inquiries and experiences (Garber, 2004). They reflect on their observations and interactions with their students in consideration of their students' needs and voices. Art educators then recalibrate their pedagogy to support and validate their students and their student's ideas and experiences (Greene, Burke, & McKenna., 2013).

Along with a student-minded pedagogy, there is also a consideration of art educators' implied positions of authority and their relationship with their students. For social justice pedagogy to be successful, there must be a willingness for students to accept their teacher as an equal, as opposed to one with authority and superiority (Miner, 2013; Dewhurst, 2010). This requires a shift in the common power relationship between teacher and student. For educators to move away from the positions of power, they must listen to their students and become "facilitators of student inquiry" (Campana, 2011, p. 286; Stuhr, 2003). Greene et al. (2013), warns educators of the consequences when students voices are not given adequate consideration: "If we don't listen to youth, particularly adolescents, we simply reinscribe our own ideas about civic engagement" (pg.328). As art educators involve themselves in social justice art education, they must commit to constant reflection and review of their perspectives and pedagogy. This

self-examination assists art educators in modeling and facilitating critical inquiry and reflection to their students.

The Need for Social Justice Art Education

Social justice art education brings the possibilities of transformation and reimagination into classrooms, communities, the experiences of students and teachers, and the field of art education. Through social justice art practice, common and traditional perspectives of art and art education are unframed and questioned. Historically, art education in the U.S. has focused on the technical skills of art production and formalist aesthetics and has steered away from controversial topics and concepts (Darts, 2006; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Holloway & Krensky, 2001; Gude, 2004). With these formalist perspectives being upheld, meaning-making and connections to personal experience and identity in art are lost. In contrast, social justice art education upholds art as a vehicle for transformation and possibility: “a contested terrain that offers different ways of considering, imagining, and representing our lived situation” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007, p. 7).

Social justice art education positions students in the center of learning where they can critique, reimagine, and transform existing knowledge (Powell & Serriere, 2013). It also asks students to critically deconstruct power structures and systems that promote and perpetuate social injustices (Albers, 1999; Maguire & Lenihan, 2010). Through critical engagement, students learn more about themselves and their social contexts (Stewart, 2012). They also develop stronger connections to their communities and the world through civic engagement and responsibility (Holloway & Krensky, 2001; Stewart, 2012). Maxine Greene (1995, 1998) acknowledged the arts as a medium of reimagination and social transformation. She believed that art allowed students the capacity to reimagine and envision a just world. Imagination in the arts became a

method of “decentering” or moving past self-interest to one where students considered their responsibilities as citizens of society and the needs and voices of others (Greene, 1995, p. 31; Greene 1998). Through engaging in art for social justice, students are provided opportunities to foster empathy and to collaborate with one another in solidarity which is critical in a world of diversity and globalization.

Teachers are also transformed in the practice of social justice art education. Art educators become engaged in authentic instruction by encouraging students to “immerse themselves in real life themes and ideas in real and meaningful ways that foster real solutions and have significance beyond the classroom” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998, p. 16). They reconsider how they view art education and imagine new and alternative pedagogical practices (Quinn et al., 2012). They also question and reconsider their roles as educators and take on the position of facilitating student learning and inquiry.

Conclusion

Much of the literature I reviewed, discussed how art educators need to rethink the role of art education, their role as teachers, and the construction of art curriculum through the perspective of social justice. The literature also examined social justice art practice with a K-12 focus and discussed how students and teachers collaborated in the co-construction of knowledge and understanding. Most of the studies implemented qualitative research methods such as action research and case studies. There is, however, a need for more qualitative studies, particularly ones using interviewing and autoethnographical methods to gain further understanding of the experiences of students and teachers in social justice art practice. As art educators and scholars understand more about social justice art practices and experiences, we will be able to clearly define which methods work towards social transformation, provide additional rationales for

social justice art advocacy, and better prepare and inform fellow art educators on social justice art practice (Dewhurst, 2010).

Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Designing the Project

I started constructing this study in the Fall of 2016 and concluded it in February 2017. In the months of October and November, I facilitated a pilot study focused on connecting identity and personal experiences to social issues through social justice art practices. I worked with a mixed group of high schoolers and young adults in a community setting. Over the course of three weeks, we met in coffee shops and engaged in group discussion, activities and art-making sessions involving responsive visual journaling, black-out poetry, exquisite corpse activities and a collaborative art piece. By the second week, participants created visual journal entries involving a social topic of their choice. Some of the chosen topics dealt with racial stereotyping and environmentalism. Through this study, I learned about how many of the participants did not have much exposure to topics such as identity and social justice in the art classes they attended in high school. Participants also shared with me that they appreciated the experiences and meetings, because they began thinking about issues that they haven't considered and thought were important.

This initial experience inspired questions to consider for this study and helped prepare me for the construction of the project investigated in this report. I hoped to learn from this

experience, how students would respond to and work with social justice topics in an art classroom. I wanted to do a similar study at the high school where I am currently teaching, but I knew that there would be adjustments. I had to consider the context of my study and be aware of the possible challenges and limitations due to implementing the study at a public school. With guidance and influence from the literature, resources on human rights education (Amnesty International, 2011; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017), and critical pedagogy, I constructed a unit of lessons where students would learn and engage with social justice art education. These lessons incorporated art-making, research, exposure to contemporary, socially-engaged artists and written reflections. My initial plans for the unit were to include three art studio lessons, responsive visual journaling, mini-lessons and activities that would support the students' investigation of their topics. The three art studio lessons would cover sequential themes: identity, navigating through and connecting with social justice, and the final social justice project. During the implementation of the unit, certain lessons were altered and adjusted to fit the needs of the students and will be explained further in this report.

Site of the Study

The study was conducted in a suburban high school in Georgia. The school has an estimated enrollment of 2,500 students and belongs to one of the top three biggest school districts in the state. The school is relatively new, having been opened in 2008. For this study, I chose a year-long Sculpture course which meets from Monday to Friday for fifty-five minutes. This class meets in one of the three allotted visual art classrooms at the school. The classroom has off-white concrete walls, no windows, and a door that connects to the kiln room; the room was decorated and organized by the art teacher who has been at the school for five years. The walls are adorned with images of sculptural artwork created by the Masters, famous Modernist

artists, and lesser known contemporary artists. Because I only had a few days to prepare before the beginning of the school year, I did not have a chance to alter much. There is an island in the middle of the room which my sculpture students insist on using its counter space as storage and an excuse for not putting their supplies away. There are cabinets filled with materials and tools such as saws, goggles, and clay tools and two sinks. The classroom has eight, big black tables with metal stools surrounding each table. The students occupy six of the tables and have assigned seating.

I choose this site because I currently teach at this school and am the instructor for the class. Due to my personal and professional connection to this school, I believed I would be able to collect the most insightful and relevant data for my research.

Being a Teacher-Researcher

Using an action research methodology, I positioned myself as a practicing teacher and an educational researcher. During the implementation of this study, I was in a unique situation as I was a first-year teacher and a part-time graduate student. Taking on the role as a teacher-researcher involved a balancing act of constant and critical reflexivity while juggling the responsibilities and commitments of being a teacher which included the creation of lesson plans, grading and the daily management of the classroom along with the practices of a researcher. The duality of my position provided benefits and challenges. The greatest challenges came from balancing these two roles of teacher and researcher. Due to the occupational obligations of teaching and a commitment to my students' learning, I had limited time and attention to devote to the practices of research (Labaree, 2003). Throughout the implementation of the study, I quickly jotted down notes, observations, and thoughts to return to later and to avoid major interference in my teaching. At the end of each school day, I journaled my reflections on the

experiences that occurred. These reflections informed my decisions during the research process and captured the social justice art practices I implemented in the classroom.

The biggest benefit of being a teacher-researcher was the personal perspective and awareness I had of my students, classroom, and school. Over the course of teaching my students for more than a semester, I gained rapport with my students and a greater understanding of the context of my classroom. According to Kennedy-Lewis (2012), teacher researchers have an “insider’s perspective” which improves their ability to “perceive and interpret nuances in classrooms and schools” (p. 108). This teacher perspective allowed me to construct a social justice art curriculum with consideration of my students. It also created a sense of trust and democracy in my classroom due to the positive relationships the students had with one another and with me.

Participants

The participants of this study were students enrolled in my Sculpture class. I focused on four students from a class of twenty-one. The four students are upperclassmen; two of them are 10th graders and the other two are 12th graders. Three of the students are female while one of them is male. The racial breakdown of the sample participants is as follows: Caucasian (25%), African-American (50%), and Asian (25%).

Travis, a white male and a senior in high school, enjoys working with hands-on, sculptural mediums such as clay and had his artwork displayed in the district’s art show. He plays for the school’s tennis team and is often found in the art room during lunch. He will graduate this May with honors. Nicole, also a senior in high school, is African-American, having roots from Nigeria. She just transferred from another high school in the district and took part in

the sculpture class as a Sculpture II student. Nicole has a fun-loving and calm demeanor and easily makes friends with those around her. Hailey is a creative and thoughtful sophomore. She is African-American and is usually found with headphones in her ears, lost in her own thoughts and ideas. Hailey always looks for ways to lend a helping hand for her classmates. Lastly, Amy is a Chinese sophomore who just moved to America this past year. When I first met Amy, she was excited to see that her art teacher was also Chinese. Amy has a bubbly personality that has allowed her to adjust to school in America quite well.

The reason I chose this class for this study is due to the advanced nature of the course and the smaller size of the class. All of the students in my sculpture class had completed the prerequisite, foundational visual art courses, and had been given the autonomy to choose if they would like to continue to take advanced art courses. Many students who enroll in advanced art courses do so due to their passion or enjoyment of the arts. They are also equipped with knowledge of foundational art skills and techniques. Due to their prior experience in the visual arts, the participants in this sample are more prepared to tackle the process of social justice art than the two other foundational art classes I teach.

Data Collection

Data collected in this study includes my field notes based on observations, ongoing dialogue and discussion happening in the classroom, analytical memos, and students' written reflections and artwork. Hubbard & Power (2003) state that for teacher-researchers, "the most important tool you have as a researcher is your eye and your view of classroom life" (p. 38). Observations were recorded as field notes on a regular basis. Often, due to the demands and business of teaching, I would jot down a word or phrase on a scrap piece of paper or in a Word document containing my notes. I would elaborate on my notes after work or when time permitted

during the week. I tried to write out all my observations and reflections at the end of each week. Along with these field notes, I wrote analytical and reflexive memos. These memos allowed me to keep track of my involvement in the study, analyze my experiences in an ongoing manner, and make decisions and changes to the study as deemed appropriate (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012).

Student data included three different artworks they created throughout the unit; one artwork addressed their identity, while the other two involved the students' chosen social justice topic. Data also included written reflections which included a written artist statement for their final project and answering questions about their experiences throughout the unit and about social justice. These written reflections and art pieces also gave me insight on how the students engaged with social justice and what the students were attending to throughout the social justice art practice.

Chapter 4: IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction & Identity

It was the first day back from winter break. I prepared the previous day for this unit, making sure that the stage was set for our first lesson on identity. I was nervous but ready to dive into the unknown. The fifth-period bell rang, and students began to enter the classroom. Questions such as “What is identity?” and “What is your definition of identity?” were projected on the screen at the front of the class. I began the classroom discussion by asking for responses. Responses back from the class were hesitant, making for awkward moments of silence. Fortunately, I anticipated the possibility of a quiet classroom. Therefore, I prepared another method of getting the discussion going. Students were asked to write down their definitions of identity on a post-it note and to paste the note on a piece of butcher paper. At the end of the activity, I read aloud some of the answers the students provided.



Figures 1 and 2. Identity & Social Justice Definition Post-It Notes

The responses were varied, but a majority of students considered identity as “who you are.” Students comments included, “I feel like identity is how one describes themselves and not how others see them. “Identity is yourself,” “Identity is who you are and what you believe,” and “Identity is what defines you, the different characteristics are part of your identity.” I then provided the students with a dictionary definition on identity which included: “[Identity] is defined simply as who a person is or in question form: Who am I?” (Oxford University Press, 2017). Then, we discussed how identity can include how others perceive the person. When asked if art and identity were related, many students replied with a yes, but could not put into words why. Then students were asked to do the same post-it process in answering the question, “What do you know about social justice?” Students had more difficulty answering this question than the previous question on defining identity. Many students indicated on their post-it notes that they did not know. The following response from one student stood out to me: “Social justice is fighting for what’s right even if others try to stop you. It’s about solving problems many choose to ignore.” I then provided a definition of social justice art from Marit Dewhurt’s (2010) article *An Inevitable Question*. The article noted that social justice art involves “creating art that draws attention to, mobilizing action towards, or attempting to intervene in systems of inequality or injustice” (p.7).

After going through some introductory questions, I presented to the students three contemporary artists who use identity in their artwork or artmaking process: Gabriel Garcia Roman, Wendy Ewald, and Shirin Neshat. The students seemed impressed and moved by the work of contemporary artists. Students looked at Gabriel Garcia Roman’s *Queer Icon* series and found his piece *Eric*, empowering. A few students nodded their heads and exclaimed with

interest as I explained how Roman asks the subjects of his portraits to formulate their own text and that this series purpose was to shed light on the experience of people of color in the LGBT community.

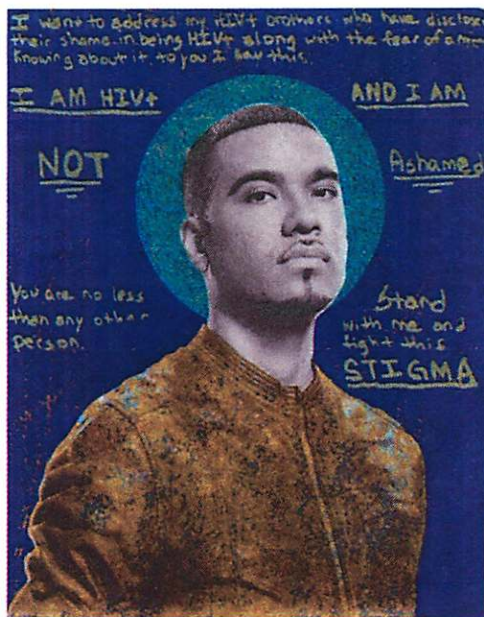


Figure 3. Gabriel Garcia Roman, *Eric* (2014), Photogravure with Chine-Colle, 11in x14in
Retrieved from: <http://www.gabrielgarciaroman.com/queer-icons-home>



Figure 4. Shirin Neshat, *Nida (Patriots)* (2012), Ink on LE silver gelatin print, 60 x 45 inches
Retrieved from: <http://www.gladstonegallery.com/artist/shirin-neshat/>

Students were then asked to complete an identity map based on Congdon, Stewart and White's (2001) identity map and questions (see Appendix A). The identity map consisted of different sections of one's identity such as occupation and ethnic background. Students were provided with prompt questions to help them consider these different aspects of their identities such as "Family is of great significance, somewhat significant, not at all significant to me because?" and "My [ethnic/cultural background] identity is important or relatively unimportant because?" (Congdon et al., 2001, p. 112-114). They were also asked to rank these different aspects of their identity from most important to least important. Many students wrote down short descriptions in their identity maps. Due to the personal nature of the activity, students were not asked to share their responses. They were only to share what sections ranked as their most important; for most of my students, it was their family. One student, Mark, shared that to him, family was of great importance "because they are proof of me, my heritage and my past." Students stated that gender, geography, age, and occupation were the least important aspects of their identities. When asked if it was important to understand our identities, many students affirmed that it was important. Students then explained how when our identity is defined we can critically examine how people perceive us or who they ask us to be. Another student stated that knowing our identity helps us make better choices due to having a greater understanding of ourselves.

Figure 7. Anna's Identity Project [The text incorporate are lyrics from her favorite Serbian song]

Research and Creating Zines

During the art-making process for the identity portraits, I asked the students to brainstorm social issues that interested them. I provided the students with some questions to help them think of topics that they connect with. For example, I asked students to describe things they may have experienced that they would want to see changed. Right after the conclusion of the identity portrait lesson, students began researching their chosen topic. I reserved a computer lab at the school and provided them questions to help guide their research process (Appendix C). Before I set the students free to research their topics, I gave a presentation on zines. Zines are an informal magazine medium initially used to inform the public about the artistic ideologies prominent in the 1920s (Desyllas & Sinclair, 2014). The use of zines has progressed over time and is an informative media, allowing the exposure of social injustices through an artistic and uncensored means. They also provide a platform for voices and ideas that challenge the status quo or the common, social narrative. I explained to the students that they would be creating their own zine for their topic based on their research findings.

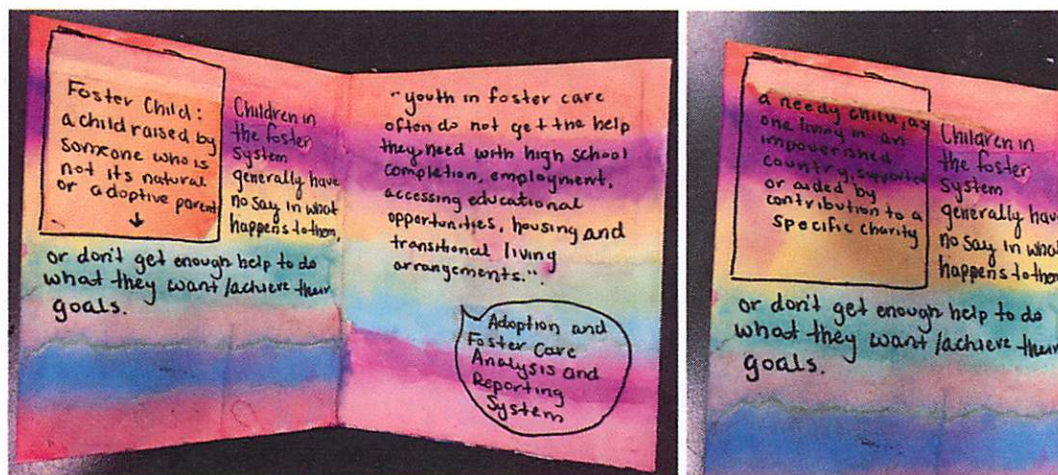


Figure 8. Hailey's Zine on Foster Care

It was encouraging to see students choose topics that intersected with their experiences and passions. For example, Anna selected the topic of animal abuse. She shared with me how she works at an animal shelter and wanted to use photographs she has taken at the shelter to use in her zine. Another student, Hailey was trying to decide on whether to do her topic on either LGBT issues or foster care; she stated that she identifies with both topics. I also had a few students who needed assistance in choosing their social justice topic. Therefore, I sat down with them individually and asked them questions about their own experiences and if they found anything troubling or in need of change in those experiences. Our discussions led to topics such as bullying and racial stereotyping.

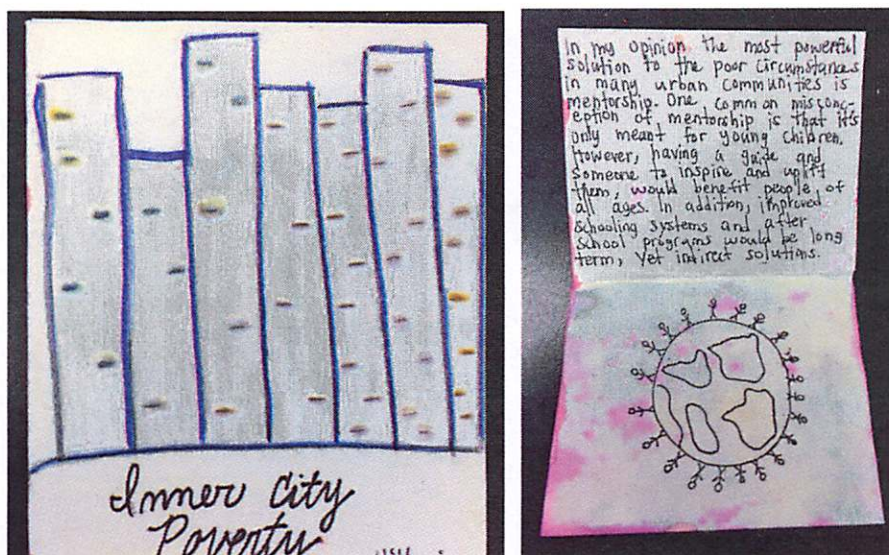


Figure 9. Nicole's Zine on Inner City Poverty

One student, Anthony, was troubled due to the controversial nature of the topic he wanted to research. He wanted to address how certain social justice movements can lead to rather extreme stances. I listened carefully. After reading the Amnesty International handbook (2011) and the Greene, Burke, and McKenna article (2013), I discovered that it's important to

encourage students throughout the process of the project and to lend a listening ear. I listened to his ideas, making sure not to immediately reject them due to the fact that I was uncomfortable with its controversial nature. In response, I tried to steer his idea to one where extreme stances on social issues can work against the cause the movement was trying to mobilize. Anthony was receptive to this idea and went back to his computer to begin researching. Later it came to my attention that his topic was not working towards social justice. Rather it was a criticism of social justice. I consulted my professors about how I should approach the situation and ended up having another discussion with Anthony. I was nervous to talk to him because I did not know how Anthony would respond. Surprisingly, he was understanding. He changed his topic to issues and injustices with incarceration. This experience shed light on the unpredictable nature of social justice pedagogy and the need for open dialogue between student and teacher. A collaborative discussion meant I didn't have to know all the answers and required that I was receptive to learn alongside my students.

The students spent two days researching their topics and then began constructing their zines. They were expected to include information from their research to help inform their audience about their topic. Between our work on the zines and the final studio project, we began to hit an artist's block. I decided to do an exquisite corpse activity with the students, to help them navigate deeper and become more connected to their chosen topics. Students were asked to draw three parts of the body: the head, torso, and legs. The head would represent what the student thought about their topic, the torso would represent how they felt about their topic, and the legs would represent what actions should be taken to help alleviate or bring justice to their topic.

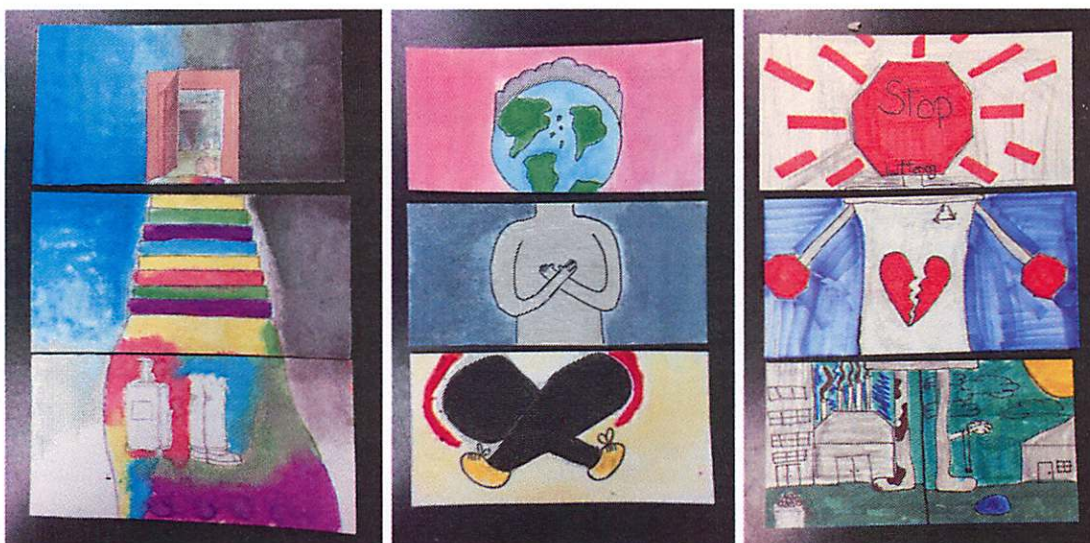


Figure 10. A Few of the Students' Exquisite Corpses

After explaining the instructions for the activity, students sat at their tables looking completely lost. Some students asked me for help. Trying to provide students with a springboard for their ideas, I found that articulating and portraying complex emotions and thoughts was even difficult for myself. As a teacher-facilitator who came into this unit not knowing where it would lead, I was troubled with seeing the students frustrated and giving up. I began thinking about their frustrations before and after school, wondering what could be done to help them. Initially, I was planning to do another studio lesson with the students that would also incorporate symbolism and was one that I realized was rather similar to the exquisite corpse lesson. After reflection, brainstorming, and discussion with my colleagues and professors, I decided to move on from the exquisite corpse lesson and skip the lesson I had planned. By then we were a month into the unit, and I could see my students losing stamina. To reinvigorate my students, I decided to start on the final studio project.

Final Studio Project

After deciding to move on to the final sculpture, based on their chosen topic, I checked in with how my students were doing. I asked the class how they were feeling about the social justice unit. Anthony shared, “As much as I like drawing and painting, this is a sculpture class, so I’m expecting to work on sculptural things.” Students also nodded in agreement when I stated that the projects might have been more difficult because it’s hard conceptualizing and coming up with visuals for abstract topics and meanings. I tried to reassure the students that as difficult as the previous projects might have been, all the work that they did was to work up and prepare them for this final studio project.

I explained to the students that for the final project, they were going to create a sculpture, using the medium of their choice that addresses their social justice topic. Also, I shared with the students contemporary artists to provide sources of inspiration and examples of how other artists bring attention to social issues and mobilize social change. When creating the presentation, I wanted to find sculptural artwork that addressed topics similar to the ones my students have chosen. The artists presented to the students were Ai Wei Wei, Luke Jerram, and Jaime Shafter.

Once the presentation was over, the students and I created the objectives and expectations for this final project: the project was to be sculptural, students had a choice of which mediums would be appropriate for the project, and the artwork would relate to their social topic. Students wrote a proposal, explaining the possible ideas for their project and provided drafts of what the project would look like. Most of my students bypassed the paperwork and verbally told me their plans for their project and social topic. Once the students had my approval, they began to create their sculptures.

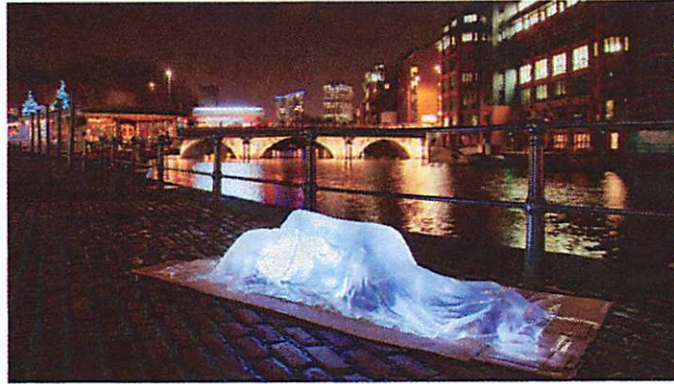


Figure 11. Luke Jerram, *Invisible Homeless* (2014), Glass
Retrieved from: <https://www.lukejerram.com/invisible-homeless/>

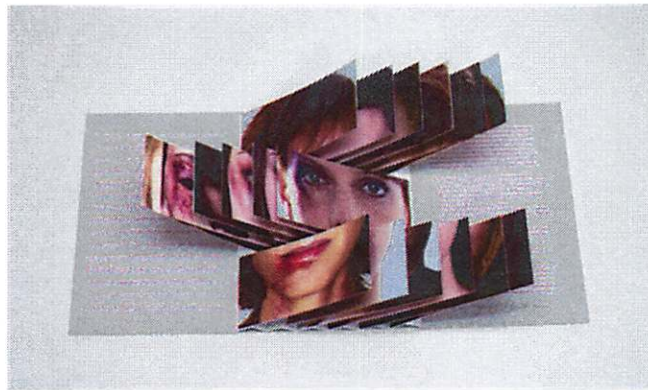


Figure 12. Jaime Shafer, *1 in 3* (2014), Letterpress printed from metal type and photopolymer plates, 6" x 9" x .5."
Retrieved from: <http://www.jaimelynnshafer.com/1-in-3.html>

While brainstorming, students came up to me to discuss possible routes to take for their project. As a facilitator, I asked my students questions to support and inspire them. Throughout our studio times together, I helped students flesh out their ideas and techniques. For example, Nicole asked me to choose between two ideas she had for her project on inner city poverty. She was juggling with either to create a sculpture of a broken-down, old car or to create a wall with graffiti on it. I asked her what were the meanings behind the imagery and she explained to me how she got the idea for the car based on seeing many similar broken-down cars in the city. As we engaged in discussion, I suggested to Nicole that the broken-down car might be the better choice. We talked about how certain images, such as a graffiti wall, can have pre-conceived

notions and meanings. In contrast, the imagery behind a broken-down car is not as obvious and may lead the viewer of the artwork to wonder what the intention is behind the art piece.

Another student, Ariel, was trying to work out her ideas on what to do about her topic on LGBT rights and experience. She wanted to focus on the concept of love but was weary of using heart imagery or using rainbow colors. She stated that those choices would be “too simple.” So I shared with her the conversation I had with the Nicole and suggested that she could do something more abstract. She started thinking and began coming up with possible ideas. She later shared with me at the end of class that she was very excited about the project which left me in anticipation of what she would create.

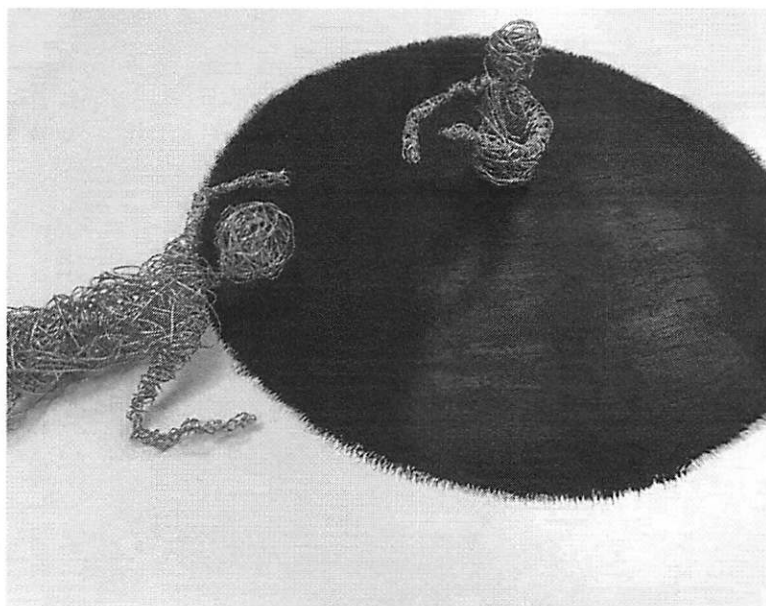


Figure 13. Kayla's Social Justice Project on Human Trafficking; Wire and Acrylic Paint

In the weeks to come, the sculpture room was a place of business and slight chaos. Supplies from wire cutters to wood glue were in disarray; there were tables covered in residual clay dust and containers of paper mache pulp lying on the counters. Each day, for two and a half weeks, students would come in, take out their projects and begin working. The art-making

process for the students ebbed and flowed, as there would be days of waiting for clay to be fired or paper mache to dry. Most of the mediums that the students choose to work with were process-based which lead to the need for great amounts of studio time. This also resulted in a good number of students not being able to fully complete their project by the deadline, which was pushed back three times due to how much time the students needed.

Every day also involved checking in with the students individually to see if they needed support or help troubleshooting problems. Dewhurst (2014) recognized in her study that students were challenged to balance the purpose behind their artwork and the aesthetic conceptualization of the purpose. Students had to identify the appropriate mediums and techniques to their intentions for their artwork. This was also a challenge for my students. For example, Ariel, who initially wanted to create a complex piece, ended up deciding to create a sculpture incorporating the LGBT flag and equality symbol. Ariel was out sick for almost half of the time allotted for the project which lead her to work on a sculpture that wasn't as intricate as her initial plans.



Figure 14. Ariel's Social Justice Project on LGBT Rights; Paper Mache Pulp and Acrylic Paint

Another one of my students, Skyler, was doing her project on the topic of littering and initially wanted to create an elaborate sculpture incorporating a trash can made out of wood. She later came across some difficulties as her father ended up throwing away her project due to working on her project at home. Skyler decided to create a new sculpture with the limited time that she had. I recognized that the lack of time and the unpredictable nature of life were common factors that came with school culture. I had many students come across certain artistic problems, and a handful of students were out sick for days on end during the time allotted for this project. I wish I could have given my students more time to work on their projects, but with almost two months into the semester, I also had to consider the requirements and expectations from my school of how many projects must be completed and the standards we must cover.

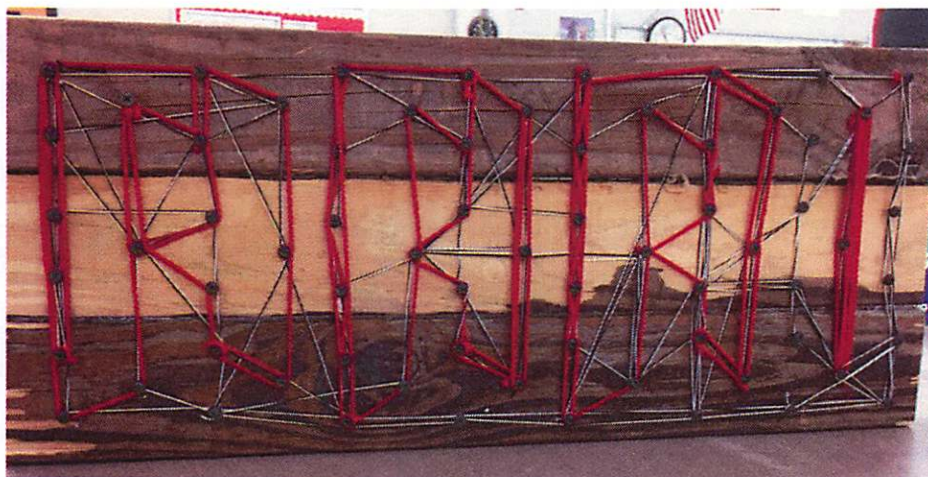


Figure 15. Skyler's Social Justice Project on Littering; Wood, Nails, and String

As students were finishing up, I asked them to write an artist statement and answer a few reflective questions about the project (handout on Appendix D). On the last day of the study, the students brought out their projects and their artist statements. We finished off the projects by having a critique, where students would view the artwork that was displayed around the room. Students wrote responses to questions such as, "What message are you receiving from the

artwork?” and “Do you think the artwork is effective in carrying out what the artist is trying to say? Why or why not?” When reading the responses, the artist statements, and looking at the artworks the students have created, I felt a sense of accomplishment but also incompleteness.

Accomplishment, in the sense that the students were able to break some ground and that as a new teacher I implemented a unit that is different from traditional units that promote formalist and school art-making. There was a sense of incompleteness as if there was still yet so much more ground to break. Powell and Serriere (2013) discovered in their art-based studies that “unframing ‘education’ is never complete. There is always more to uncover, more to expand and embrace” (pg. 22). There was still yet so much to learn and explore when it came to social justice art.

Chapter 5: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Along with fellow art educators and scholars practicing social justice art, I wasn't sure what to expect as I invited my students to connect art with social justice. My students and I entered into an evolving process required to create meaningful art. This process provided new experiences for all of us and left me as the teacher in constant states of not knowing what would occur next.

Throughout the study, analysis included constant reflection on the data. This reflection involved indexing my data and recording my interpretations and connections through written and recorded memos. I consistently thought about the conversations and experiences I shared with my students during my work commute and the quiet moments of my life. I then recorded my thoughts through the audio-recording application on my phone and my researcher journal. I transcribed my audio-recordings and carefully re-read my field notes. I then wrote memos in the margins of my field notes and separate pieces of paper for notes about students' artwork and their written reflections. As I reflected and analyzed the data, I attempted to find possible answers to my research questions: (1) How do students interact and engage with social justice topics and issues in an art classroom? (2) What do students learn when social justice is integrated into the art classroom? and (3) How should art educators position themselves when implementing social justice art education?

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings in consideration to these questions and the implications of this study on a micro (my journey as an art educator) and macro (the field of art education) level. Findings from this study included: (1) students' attempts at translation or meaning-making which led to the use of prior visual culture and misinterpretation of students' intended messages, (2) changed perspectives on art and social justice where students saw art as a

vehicle for connecting personal experiences to social issues, and (3) considerations for how art educators should position themselves as self-aware and reflexive facilitators who engage with students' art-making processes through dialogue . Many of the findings provided answers to my research questions but also gave me much more to consider with social justice art.

How Students Engage with Social Justice Art

As I considered how the students engaged with social justice art and what they learned from the experience, I saw that each student's journey with topics of social justice was unique. The diverse range of these experiences is due to the differing perspectives, values and past experiences each student brought as well as unexpected events. Many of the students I worked with had never been exposed to or thought of social justice before. As mentioned earlier, when students were asked what they knew about social justice many students responded with blank faces and written answers of, "I don't know" and "Nothing." The proposal of a social justice unit seemed daunting for the students, as they were venturing into unknown territory. This was a common starting point for students and one that informed my understanding of how the students would engage with social justice art.

To recognize how students engage with and learn from social justice art, I needed to be fully involved in students' experiences during the unit. This involvement includes being aware of students' prior knowledge and experiences, asking students about their thought processes during art-making and having students reflect on the entire experience. Two prominent findings began to emerge as I interpreted my data: (1) processes students used to translate their messages and intentions into images, and (2) students' changing perspectives on their role as responsible, civic citizens and the uses of art.

Translation: Grappling with Meaning-Making

When discussing how students in the study engaged with social justice, mentioning students' attempts at meaning-making is unavoidable. Students constantly grappled with the process of translating their verbal messages about social issues into imagery. Dewhurst (2010) labels this process as translation. It is where artists "critically reflect on the purposes of their artwork to match those with appropriate artistic tools, materials, and techniques" (p. 10). Other art educators (Anderson et al., 2010) have witnessed their students' attempts at the intricate process of translation whereby "most of the students were not able to make images as complex as their ideas" (p. 183). Even with the challenge of working with abstract concepts and complex ideas, the sculpture students attempted to transform and incorporate meanings into their artworks. As I analyzed and reflected on Nicole's, Amy's, Travis's and Hailey's experiences, artworks and written responses, I discovered two different considerations involving students' interactions with translation: influences from prior visual culture and experience, and disconnections between students' intentions and viewers' interpretations.

As I observed and analyzed student artworks, I witnessed the use of prior visual culture and common symbols. Some of the projects did not move beyond symbolism that was readily understood or already used to advocate for human rights and social justice. Two examples of such projects are Amy's project on bullying (Figure 16) and Ariel's project on LGBT rights (Figures 14).

Amy's project represented the topic of bullying, particularly bullying experienced by international students. Her project consisted of a ceramic representation of the world to display unity. In Amy's artist statement, she stated: "My project is about people getting bullied in school. So, I want everyone to know that we live in the same place. We should treat everyone the

same.” Ariel’s project focused on LGBT rights and is a paper mache sculpture of the LGBT flag with an equal sign in the middle. Her artist statement explained the meaning behind the equal signs and the colors she chose: “The equal sign makes the point of equality for everyone. The rainbow colors of the piece go with LGBT flag and community.”

As students worked to make meaning, they drew from visual imagery and culture that they had seen before. For some students, their projects did not derive much from their prior knowledge of certain imagery and symbols. With the use of prior visual imagery, students were not creating their own or new meanings. Witnessing this occurrence made me consider ways I could help students to think more deeply and move past just skimming the surface of these social issues. Answering these reflective questions wasn’t necessarily easy as I also had to consider the study’s limitations and unforeseen challenges such as time. Some students compromised their intricate ideas due to the lack of time. Other students did not necessarily have the required artistic skills to manifest their ideas; for example, a student stated in their written reflection. “I knew what I wanted to do but it was hard to find something not easy but not too hard to do.” With reflection and hindsight, some strategies emerged that could help students engage in more thoughtful meaning-making such as introducing students to Gude’s (2004) postmodern principles and providing more detailed investigations of visual culture. I believe these strategies could help students work past or elaborate on already established symbols and visual meaning.



Figure 16. Amy's Social Justice Project on Bullying; Ceramics

In some artworks, students' attempts at translation were interesting and unexpected. There seemed to be a disconnect between students' intentions for their artwork and viewers' interpretations of the artwork. An example of this phenomena is Nicole's old-fashioned telephone (Figure 18) which was an art piece discussing the topic of inner city poverty. In Nicole's artist statement, she describes her intentions for the sculpture: "The phone that I created is meant to indicate the lack of progress that has been made in the inner cities" (artist statement, February 2017). The interpretations of her art piece by her peers contrasted. When students in the class were asked to complete written critiques of three artworks, they could choose questions to answer about the artworks. One of the provided questions asked, "What message are you receiving from the artwork?" Students who critiqued Nicole's artwork answered the question with responses such as "The project's message is showing that you can call for everyone" and "Your project tells me that no matter how far away you are, you can still call people" (peer critique, February 2017). These interpretations from viewers of the artwork differed greatly from Nicole's intent.

When I recognized this contrast between messages, I began to wonder how did Nicole's message disappear? I also pondered on the cognitive and artistic choices Nicole made that lead to the production of her project. As I reflected on these questions, it was difficult to find complete answers. Some of the rationale behind Nicole's artistic choices focused on aesthetics alone. In her artist statement, she explained that "Initially, I made an old, beaten up car but I thought that the phone would look neater." I also remembered how she changed the idea for her project, two weeks before the deadline, because she was no longer satisfied with her prior idea and how it was looking aesthetically. She still desired to create a piece that represented a lack of change and progress in the issue of inner city poverty, which is why she considered objects that were aged or old-fashioned.



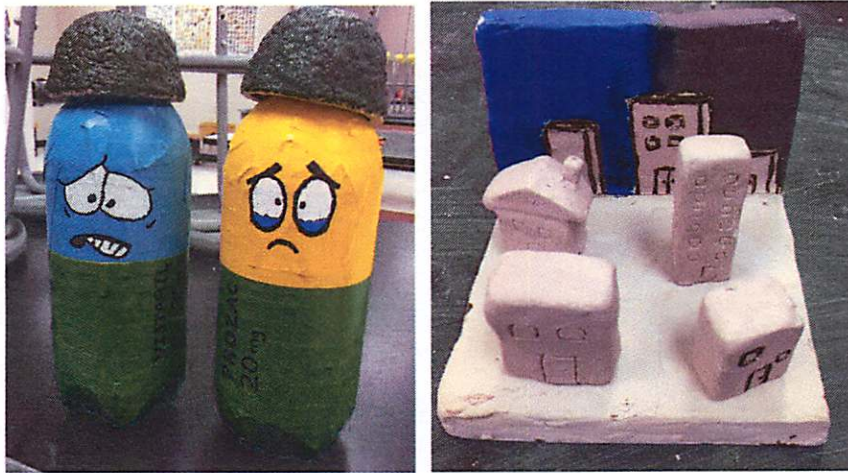
Figure 18. Nicole's Social Justice Project on Poverty in Inner Cities; Ceramics & Acrylic Paint

When recognizing Nicole's process and understanding her choices, it's easy to see how an unaware audience can misinterpret her intentions for the artwork. The misinterpretation of student's artwork brings up the discussion of whether the success or value of a social justice art is dependent on the student's ability to convey a message to potentially create social change or the process that the student goes through in engaging with social justice work. To reiterate Dewhurst's (2010) considerations of social justice art, educators debate whether "emphasis is

placed on the process or the product of artmaking” (pg.7). Based on my findings and experiences in this study, I believe both are of equal importance. The engagement with social justice topics occurs in the art-making process and product. Both are telling of the experiences and thought-processes students are having in creating art with meaning and message.

With regards to the importance of process and product, evaluating social justice artwork becomes complex. The art educator is left to determine the components of a successful social justice art piece. This process is rather difficult due to the lack of resources on how to assess and evaluate social justice work. During this study, I found myself grading and evaluating the artworks with a lenient eye. It was easier to evaluate the artworks on common art principles such as craftsmanship and composition than more abstract objectives such as conceptual elements. It was especially challenging to assess students’ abilities to effectively communicate their intentions and messages on social issues through a visual means. This is due to the subjective nature of interpreting students’ artworks. Also, considerations towards the process of making social justice art can be difficult to have in school settings due to the common focus on the art product. I believe that the assessment of social justice art must consider the various components in the creation of the artwork. Teachers must consider and reflect on not just the art product, but students’ sketchbooks, written reflections, discussions and activities that make up the whole social justice art experience. I hope as more art educators teach for social justice, more defined and relevant evaluation tools will be formed.

Learning from Social Justice Art: Changing Student Perspectives on Art & Social Justice



Figures 19 & 20. Travis's Social Justice Project on PTSD in soldiers (left); Paper Mache, Plastic, Acrylic Paint; Hailey's Social Justice Project on Foster Care (right); Ceramics & Acrylic Paint

As students created social justice art, they saw art take on a new role. Amy shared in her written reflection about her new understanding of art: "I learned that art can really show people what they want it to tell [them] about" (written reflection, February 2017). Students had a hands-on experience of creating art that moved beyond just formalist aesthetics and interacted with art as a vehicle for meaning making. When the students constructed their own meanings, they derived their messages from their personal experiences and narratives. This connection between the personal and art is characteristic of critical art education, but social justice art education adds another connection. Social justice art education helps students connect their experiences and identity through art to the larger social landscape. I witnessed these connections in the Hailey's and Amy's work. Hailey decided to investigate and work with the topic of foster care. Before this study, Hailey shared with me how she had been part of the foster care system for most of her life. Looking at Hailey's span of work during the study, I heard her voice which shared her experiences with foster care and advocated for positive change. She was informed by the research she accumulated during the study and by her own first-hand experiences. This is evident

in her work. She shared statistical information about the foster care system and her self-informed opinions in her zine (see Figure 8). She also displayed her emotions and thoughts about foster care which can be found in her written statements about her exquisite corpse (see Figure 10, artwork on the left) and her final project (see Figure 20):

Foster care makes me feel angry. There is so much that can be fixed. It could be a much better system, and it feels like nobody pays attention to the issues. It would be a lot easier if kids knew they actually mean something to someone. If kids' voices were actually heard, a lot of things would be fixed. (exquisite corpse project statement, January 2017)

In her artist statement for her final project, she mentioned again for the need to listen to the voices of children in foster care:

I made the background fade from blue to purple-ish because the sky gets darker during a storm and even though storms can appear to pretty or harmless, they can actually cause a lot of harm. Thunder makes it harder to hear small things, and foster care makes a child's voice smaller than it is. (artist statement, January 2017).

As Hailey connected her personal narrative to social justice art, she began to advocate for those who've possibly gone through similar unjust and broken experiences. She was able to take on an empowering role through social justice art.

Amy was also able to connect her personal experiences to social justice art. Being new to America, she gravitated towards other students in the school who just moved to the country. She soon made friends with another Chinese student at school. As Amy struggled to decide on a social justice topic, I asked her if there were any present or past life experiences she wished to see changed. She instantly thought of her Chinese friend who was being bullied and decided to

investigate the topic of bullying in schools. In her zine, she shared her friend's bullying experience at school and the ways bullying operates in the school setting. Amy was able to connect her art-making to an issue that involves those close to her. Through social justice art, she could give voice to her friend's experiences and the experiences of students new to America.

Along with connecting their personal experiences to social issues, students also gained new perspectives on and knowledge about their social topics and social justice. I remember Travis shaking his head at the beginning of the unit when the class was asked what they knew about social justice and his initial hesitancy towards social justice. I was surprised to discover what Travis shared in his last written reflection: "I have learned that there are a lot of issues that get pushed under the rug and go unacknowledged, but they actually greatly affect our lives" (written reflection, February 2017).

For other students, learning more about their topic motivated them to see social justice and change. In her final written reflection, Nicole shared that "through this process, I have only grown more passionate about this topic" due to the realization of the continuous cycle of inner city poverty and the need for change. In Nicole's written explanations for her exquisite corpse (See Figure 10, middle artwork), she explained her rationale for drawing the world as the figure's head: "I think that outsiders should see the bigger picture. This is a global issue." Through the practices of social justice art such as becoming informed about the areas and systems of oppression and inequity, students realized how these issues affect their lives, those around them and the world.

Positioning Ourselves as Art Educators in Social Justice Pedagogy

With guidance from social justice literature and my experiences in this study, I realized that teaching for social justice requires educators to consider new perspectives and practices that work against traditional and common forms of pedagogy. When it comes to how teachers should position themselves with social justice education, teachers should consider their role as facilitators and consistently practice reflexivity and thoughtful responsiveness towards the needs of their students. Teachers should also be aware of their biases, beliefs, and values that they bring into the classroom. With the social and political nature of social justice art, I needed to be aware of not imposing my own perspectives and interests onto my students. Though having my values and beliefs seep through my pedagogy and in my classroom is inevitable, I tried my best to facilitate instead of impose. I did this through the dialogues I shared with my students and the autonomy students were given in choosing their social topic. There were two areas of consideration that I would like to discuss in response to teaching for social justice art: avoiding a 'propaganda' approach and balancing between guiding students in their art-making and providing evaluation and criticism on student artwork.

Involving politics but not propaganda. When practicing social justice pedagogy, educators cannot avoid engaging in politics. Teaching in itself is political. Giroux (2011) emphasizes how critical pedagogy should not ignore politics:

While no pedagogical intervention should fall to the level of propaganda, a pedagogy that attempts to empower critical citizens can't and shouldn't avoid politics. Pedagogy must address the relationship between politics and agency, knowledge and power, subject positions and values and learning and social change while always being open to debate, resistance, and a culture of questioning. (pg.146-147)

As educators work alongside students on investigating social issues, it's critical for teachers not to impose their beliefs and views onto their students. This can be challenging due to possible disagreements between teacher and student on social issues, especially those that connect to our personal lives and identity. In moments of conflicting views, teachers are placed in a position to listen and help students consider areas of social injustice through dialogue and asking open-ended, exploratory questions. An example of one of these discussions was with a sculpture student named Mark. Mark, was having a difficult time finding a topic he was interested in. This was his first time being exposed to social justice, and he had expressed disinterest in creating artwork involving identity and social issues. I soon discovered as the class was researching their topics that he wanted to do his project on the debate over which was the better game console: Xbox or Playstation 4. I questioned if his topic dealt with social issues and reflected on the best ways to help direct Mark to explore deeper into his topic. One day, Mark and I had a discussion about his topic, and I asked him what he thought about how characters and genders were portrayed in video games, particularly the way video game creators represent female characters. Mark responded with a scoff and explained to me how a majority of video game creators are male, which often leads to video games made for a male audience. I was taken aback from his response due to my disagreement with what Mark was sharing with me. Yet I was reminded of how students will often have opinions and perspectives that may not be similar to their peers or even to their teacher.

It can be difficult as an educator not to impose one's beliefs, especially during disagreements and moments where there seems to be a lack of progress in understanding and examining systems and perspectives that perpetuate social injustice and inequity. Students may respond differently than expected to social justice topics and some may have little interest in

engaging with social justice. Greene (1998) recognized these challenges in awakening students to social issues:

It cannot be taken for granted that everyone will notice instances of injustice nor recognize it for what it is. It certainly cannot be assumed, given the pressures and seductions of media, that young people will resist the temptations of consumerism, competitiveness, fashion, and conventionality. (p. xxx)

Art educators who desire to teach for social justice will experience these challenges. I believe as art educators engage more with this difficult work, there will be more insight on how to have effective and empathetic discussions with students that help students awaken to the social injustices that surround them.

Evaluating social justice art. Another consideration when teaching for social justice art is balancing guiding student's art-making and evaluating and providing criticism on student artwork. Art educators consistently evaluate student's artwork. Robert Burkhart, an art educator who was interested in the evaluation of student artwork for creativity, believed in the importance of effectively assessing student's artwork for student growth: "The judgment of student artwork and attitudes while working is a difficult and complex task that cannot be avoided. It must be faced because the art teacher's educational success is directly dependent upon the clarity and precision of his judgments" (p.7). Providing effective feedback and evaluation for students without imposing my own ideas for the artwork was something I needed to be mindful of during the study.

I believe that much of my initial analysis and evaluation of the students' artworks were influenced by my position as a first-year art educator in a public school. Prior to this study, I

already had expectations for what possible, successful social justice artworks would be like. Yet throughout this study, I wanted to allow the students to construct and explore their topics without imposing. This focus on student-centered learning resulted in the need for constant conversations with individual students on the progress of their artwork. I realized that I needed to ask my students the right kind of questions to help them consider different aspects of their artwork that they may not have been thinking about. This required a revised approach to how I typically handle studio and art production time in the classroom. The discussions I had with the students during the art-making process took on another layer of complexity. These conversations elaborated past topics such as craftsmanship and aesthetics and focused more on the concepts behind the artwork and the social issue addressed.

Many art educators already engage in daily dialogue with students about their artwork, but social justice art positions art educators with less control on the outcomes. Social justice art asks educators to allow students to lead their research paths and art-making processes with educators being persons of support. This can be a challenging mode for teachers considering that teachers often enter their classrooms with expectations on how things should be. The educator who teaches for social justice, must be flexible and reflexive, providing students experiences that are meaningful for the students themselves.

Reflection

Teaching for social justice is complex and unpredictable. It is one that:

Demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students- Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities, capacities, does each one bring into the classroom?-and the other eye looking

unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context-historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality. (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998, p.xvii).

As a first-year teacher interested in teaching for social justice, this study revealed to me the complexities and difficulties in engaging students to consider and work towards creating art for social change. Each day as I drove to work, I did not know what to expect. Even with careful preparation and support from social justice literature and resources, I still felt unprepared. Similarly to other art educators who teach for social justice, I discovered that plans did not always go as expected and I could not anticipate the students' responses to these complex topics. Yet even in the midst of these challenges, I believe social justice art allows students to engage in meaning-making that connects to students' personal experiences and narratives. Freire (1968) believed that pedagogy that relates to students is one that is transformative. Teaching for social justice can be overwhelming, but it is worthwhile work.

In the field of art education, I believe there needs to more preparation and resources for practicing and pre-service teachers to learn how to engage in social justice art. There has been a growth in the literature on social justice art education, but art educators also need sounding-boards and a community of supportive educators to continue finding ways to grow in this practice. With this support, art educators can find the courage to enter this unpredictable and complex work.

Social justice art also challenges how art educators approach pedagogy and their perspectives on art. Through this study, I experienced how teaching for social justice asks me to move past traditional practices of art education pedagogy. It moved me to reflect on the ways I've taught art in the past which typically involved projects concerned with the elements and principles of art and formalist aesthetics. These projects were influenced by the observed

practices and lessons taught by fellow art educators. This route of art education was convenient for a first-year teacher, like me, who was trying keep up with the daily demands of teaching. This study allowed me to consider different approaches to art education pedagogy. Even though implementing social justice in the art classroom came with its own limitations and obstacles, I discovered that teaching art that connects to the lives and experiences of students and fosters civic responsibility was the kind of art education I wanted to be a part of. My hope as an educator is to continually reflect on my pedagogy, to discover the ways my perceptions can be challenged and to grow from those moments. Social justice art may be intimidating to art educators, but I hope there will be more teachers who are interested in engaging with this important work. For education to move towards impactful action and growth, I believe art educators must be willing to unframe the ways they teach art and their perspectives of art (Powell & Serriere, 2013). Social justice art, as I and other art educators have experienced, can be a vehicle for this unframing.

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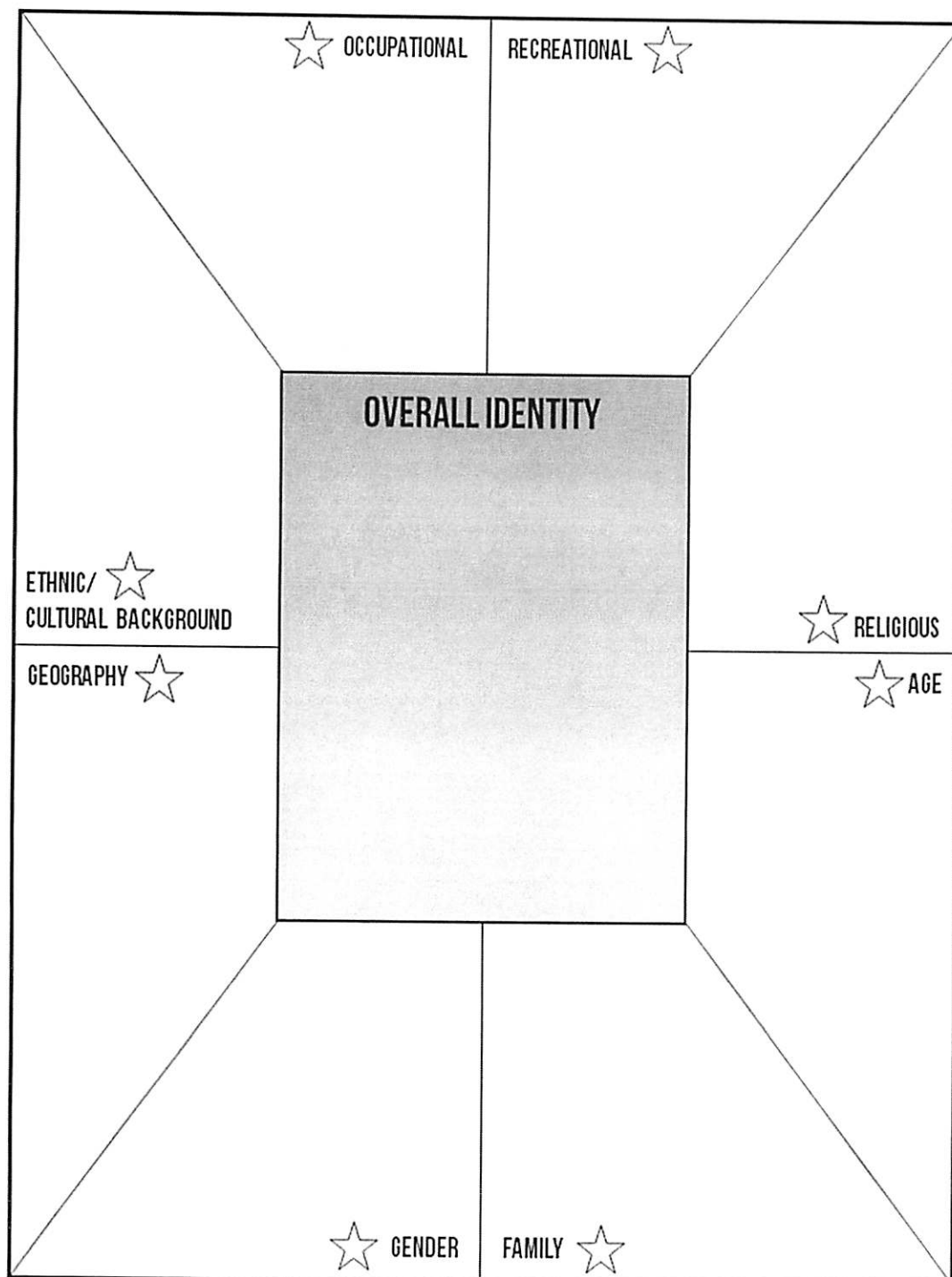
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Revised Identity Map & Questions

(Based off of Congdon, Stewart and White, 2001)



As you complete your identity map, here are some questions to consider.

You do not have to answer every question; these questions serve as a guide to filling out each section of your identity.

Ethnic/Cultural Background Identity

- My ancestors are mainly (Spanish, Italian, African-American, etc.).
- I consider myself to be (White, Black, mixed, I don't like being asked this question, etc).
- I consider my ethnic identity a heritage that is informed by my biological heritage or my cultural experience because?
- This part of my identity is important or relatively unimportant because?

Geographical Identity

- When people ask me where I am from, it is easy or hard to answer because?
- I need or do not need to have a sense of roots in a particular place because?
- I express my geographic roots to others by my (accent, eating customs, clothing, etc).

Recreational Identity

- In my spare time, I (read, play video games, sports, hobbies, etc).
- I belong to a recreational community in the following ways (play the same sport, part of a band, speak the same language, etc.).
- I don't take time for recreation because?

Age Identity

- Getting older is hard or easy because?
- I like to or do not like to spend time with others my own age because?
- Generational things I identify with that are age specific are (certain music, clothing, etc.)
- I considering myself young, middle-aged, old because?

Religious Identity

- I consider my religious identity to be what
- I share this or do not share it, with others because why?
- I consider myself as an isolated or an active religious community member because?

Gender Identity

- Most of, some of, very few of my choices in life are influenced by my gender identity.

Family Identity

- Family is of great significance, somewhat significant, not all significant to me because?
- I choose to or do not choose to spend leisure time with members of my family because?
- My definition of family is?

Occupational Identity

- I like this part of my identity, I am indifferent about this part of my identity or I want to change this part of my identity because?
- Does the rest of the world respect my occupational identity? Why or Why not?

A 3D paper sculpture of a chair, constructed from folded paper in shades of red, orange, and yellow, set against a dark background. The chair has a high back and a seat, with the backrest and seat made of a solid, dark reddish-brown material. The base and the sides of the chair are made of a lighter, pinkish-red material. The chair is surrounded by a large, dense arrangement of folded paper leaves in various shades of red, orange, and yellow, creating a vibrant, autumnal effect. The background is dark and out of focus, with some blurred shapes of other objects.

A small, open, rectangular box with a greenish-blue patina, possibly a miniature model of a chest or a small container. The box is shown from a three-quarter perspective, with its lid propped open. The interior is a lighter, yellowish-tan color. The box is set against a dark, textured background.

Sean's Project on Homelessness

Appendix C: Research Questions Handout

Name: _____ Social Justice Topic: _____

Answer these questions as you explore and learn more about the social justice topic you have chosen. Also collect 2 sources (newspaper articles, statistical data, etc) about your topic and either print them out or provide a hyperlink to the sources in the comment section of the dropbox. Make sure to submit this completed document to the dropbox also.

1. What is the current situation involving your social justice topic? (You can think of situations locally, those that are happening in the United States, and/or those that are happening around the world).

2. How does your social justice topic impact the world/community/people involved? (Negative, positive impacts)

3. Who benefits or loses because of the social justice issue? Why?

4. Why do you think this social justice issue or inequality exists?

5. What do you think are the possible solutions to your social justice issue?

6. Create your own question. Think of a question you have on your topic based on your research. Type it down below and write down the answer you find.

Appendix D: Artist Statement & Reflection Questions Handout

Name: _____

Artist Statement

Write at least 3-4 complete sentences on what you would like the viewer to know about your piece. The statement could be about the piece itself, the process of making the piece (like why did you choose the medium you choose or the colors, etc), and/or what you have learned about your topic or social justice.

Viewers of the Artwork:

Choose two of the questions below to help you critique the artwork you are viewing:

- What message are you receiving from the artwork? Why?
- Do you think the artwork is effective in carrying out what the artist is trying to say? Why or why not?
 - What do you think is the most effective or best part of the piece? Why?
 - What are areas that could use more development?

Name:
Name:
Name:

Reflections on the Project

Try your best to complete and answer the questions below 😊.

1. What are the things that you have learned about social justice, about your topic, and/or about art through this project?

2. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being easy and 10 being difficult) rate and circle how difficult it was to come up with your idea for your final project:

1 (very easy)...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10 (very difficult)

Explain your rating:
