

Katie Hatch

The Ohio State University

Karen Hutzler and Jennifer Eisenhauer

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am lucky to have found two passions so very quickly in my life. I pursued both in undergraduate at Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan. I worked towards my BFA, an art history minor, my K-12 art education certificate. My BFA show was titled “Up” and this word really encompasses my attitude towards both my art and my teaching. My art is inspired by an interest in aviation that I grew up with in my family. As a printmaker, I have a certain amount of meticulous and a certain amount of risk-taking that collides in my work. Bookmaking had also captured my attention and I can't learn new techniques fast enough. With an enthusiasm of making art and the support of my family, I embarked on my first year of teaching at Onsted Middle School. I soon discovered there is nothing cooler than hearing a student say you inspired them or even just getting a random high five from a student in the hall. It was a joy and dream come true to hear Miss Hatch. I want to use best practice and be current and relevant. I love to share with my students my love of traveling and exploring new cities. I studied in Italy for a summer and fell in love with Florence. I use my experience in learning fresco techniques to peak student's interest in art history and a trip to San Francisco and a Chihuly exhibit also enhances my lessons. I have had an opportunity to travel with the 8th grade class to Washington D.C. and enjoy sharing these experiences with my students.

From August 2007 to June 2009 I taught at Onsted Middle School in Onsted, Michigan. Onsted is in the Irish Hills of southeastern Michigan which is known for its beautiful lakes. Many of my students have a family farm, and I made the mistake of asking a class to tell me all their pets as a creative way to take attendance. Cats, dogs,

horses, pigs, a donkey named Jack and 16 ducks later (each with their own name) attendance ended up taking twenty-five minutes! The middle school is grades 6,7,8 and students have art each year mostly for two trimesters. The students are full of school spirit and athletics is valued in the community. During this time in Michigan, things were not going well for the big three car companies, and the effects came all the way down to Onsted. We lost 200 students in two years to families who had to move for work, and consequently I lost my position.

After two years of teaching middle school, I was ready for school again. I was learning from experience that art about the students was always more productive, but I had many questions still. I learned about the big idea in college, but in a general methods class, not an art education class, so I really didn't get it within context yet. I also had questions about real life connections, contemporary artists, and student critiques. The time was right. After attending a small school I decided I wanted the big university experience and applied to The Ohio State University.

It so happens that during my first week of class at OSU I was called to interview with Highland Local Schools in Medina, Ohio and accepted a job teaching elementary school and a general art one high school class. The culture at Highland was very different than that of Onsted, and having been in two distinctly different districts gave me the perspective to identify the culture of the school and community. Quite opposite of Onsted, the Highland district has increased enrollment by 1000 students in the past 12 years. The towns of Sharon, Granger, and Hinckley make up the district. These traditional farming towns have seen a burst of homes developed by professionals seeking the small town lifestyle close to their professional jobs in Cleveland and Akron.

Students at Highland are active students with expectations for success in academics. Onsted was a question if you are going to college, at Highland it is a questions of where are you going to college. This level of expectation goes across the academics and into activities such as band, volunteer organizations, and honor societies.

This enthusiasm to be involved allowed me to organized a service- learning project for high school and elementary students to work together to build a installation in one of the buildings. Along with experiences outside the classroom, inside the classroom students have been accepting of the big idea and new curriculum. They have created, written, and spoken about this new experience of making art and together our expectations of an art class have grown considerably.

Chapter 2: Teaching Meaning in Artmaking

I was told when I first got hired by Highland Local Schools that every classroom would have a Smartboard or Interwrite board. When I began to set up my classroom, I couldn't find either. I went to my principal, as I was excited to introduce my students to the big idea and technology was going to help me do it. She gave me a bewildered look and said something to the effect of, "Well, yes the classrooms each have one, but you're not a real classroom. What would you use one of those for?" Now I had a bewildered look on my face. My new principal just said I wasn't a "real classroom." I stuttered out I would use it to support my curriculum with power points, videos, and images. The answer I got was it's in the back of her mind, so to not expect one. I walked away confused. What did she mean I wasn't a real classroom? With my excitement from my summer class at The Ohio State University, and now a fire lit

underneath me to have the art room at Hinckley Elementary School become a “real classroom,” I began my planning with the new concepts I was learning in my class at the time, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*. With the tools I learned in this class and the refinements I have made along the way, I was able to change some minds and one day, mysteriously, an Interwrite Board was installed into my real classroom.

Content and Purpose

The summer introduction class kicked off the concept of the big idea, and the Designing Meaningful Curriculum class helped me to streamline the curriculum, but the bulk of changing the way I taught happened in the first few months at Hinckley Elementary School and while reading *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* by Sydney R. Walker. The Teaching Artmaking with Meaning course was set up to take us, the teacher, through the process of creating art so that we could better understand the process we create for our students. We “unpacked” the artmaking process from beginning to end. We mimicked the steps that we would eventually be teaching to our students; Personal Connections, Knowledge Building, Artist Connections, Play, Artmaking, and Final Conclusions or Reflections. Going through these steps in our own art, we reflected and discussed how these steps were being carried out in our classrooms. In our own art, we realized the value of play and doing something over and over again. We also read the book, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*. This book has become a constant reference in the development of my new teaching style. I still flip through the pages and read my notes as I lesson plan.

The Place It Started

After two years of teaching middle school, I suddenly was responsible for creating a K-5 art program. Where does an art teacher start? There is so much to consider in the art curriculum. Art history, medias, safety, tools, real-life connections, careers, and the list goes continues. I did not have the collection of lessons organized in files as I had in the high school curriculum. I was overwhelmed, until I began using the concept of the big idea. I organized what resources I did have into a few big ideas and began to get settled in the new community of Hinckley, Ohio.

Northeast Ohio is a region full of small towns that each have a rich history and a sense of community pride. One such community is Hinckley situated between the metropolitans of Akron and Cleveland. Hinckley was a farming community, and evidence of that history still remains in the many horse pastures that still scatter the community. Most of the farmland is now bursting with large homes whose homeowners are professionals seeking a small town feel away from the cities they commute to during the week. There is a unique mix of families with farming roots and families with new money that makes up the economically diverse community of Hinckley. Regardless of roots, there is an emphasize on family life in a safe and small community. The tradition and pride of Hinckley continues in the metro parks which house the buzzards. Every March the buzzards return after a cold winter to the parks, and the community gathers together to celebrate Buzzard's Day at Hinckley Elementary School.

The elementary school is the oldest building in the district as it sits in the center of the town. The school ranges in grade levels from kindergarten to fifth grade, and has a resource room for students with autism that serves the entire district. Encore, as we

call art, music, and physical education, is on a three day rotation so students have art class either once or twice a week for a 40 minute block. Expectations of behavior and performance are a school wide philosophy, and follow the students to encore with clipboards to keep track of progress. When expectations are not met, it is communicated daily with parents in the student agendas. Parents become accustomed to these expectations through their years at Hinckley and support their child and teachers. There is a high volume of parent participation at Hinckley from reading with their kids at home to volunteering at the school. The PTO is very involved in organizing volunteers, providing extra activities for students and purchasing wish list items for teachers. At least once a week there is a volunteer in my classroom. This parent participation was a culture I had to adapt to, as it was not part of the culture at my previous school. Another aspect of the culture that was new compared to a middle school setting was the structure and order that prevails in the elementary setting. Lines of students, jingles, and carpet time are parts of the life-world of elementary students, and I quickly had to adjust to cultivate creativity in a structured environment.

I had my big ideas planned, the room arranged, and ready to make art. I was nervous to begin. How would the students react to these big ideas? What would parents think when “cute” projects weren’t being sent home and how would the administration react and other teachers when the hallways looked different from than before? We dove in with the big idea of storytelling, and we haven’t looked back. Since, we have explored nature, place, heroes, celebration, identity, and reality verse fantasy and the transition has slowly taken its first steps for all involved.

A group of students who have experienced the transition had a dialogue with me about their art program. Students represented third, fourth, and fifth grade. These students have experienced the big idea in art for two years, and have been with me as we strive to make meaning in our art and from art. They range in age from 8-11. The students were chosen with the help from their homeroom teachers as students who could express their thoughts verbally. For some art is their favorite school subject while others prefer math or even recess. There was a general enthusiasm from all students about art class and each was very lively when talking about their experiences over the last two years. I also had conversations with special education aids, as they have been in the art room every week with students, as well as my newest principal to understand administration's perspective.

Play

Forty minutes every three days is a small amount of time over the course of a year. Add in Northeast Ohio snow days, and the time whittles down further. Not to mention concerts, testing, and all the other events that keeps kids away from time in my classroom, there hardly seems time at all to "play." I have discovered over the past two years though that play is such a vital part of the artmaking process both for me and my students that it is something I will always make time for in my planning and have made it a goal to include it into both my curriculums. As Walker states, it is part of our profession. "As art teachers, we must instruct, encourage, and give students permission to play, experiment, take risks, change their mind, and raise questions" (Walker p. 137).

In the Teaching Meaning with Artmaking class, the conceptual strategies of the drawing grid, commands, and thinking about oppositions really inspired my final work. I was asked to find out more about my topic without fear of failure. In my class reflection I wrote,

In my artmaking process I can get caught up in what I know already works. It's safe and comfortable. The strategies really introduced some new ways to experiment. I felt so much freer in the strategies. There was no fear in failing for me. Knowing it was about the process and not the product took that away. The strategies pushed my ideas further and deeper because I felt no pressure to produce finals. Ironically, these strategies found their way into my final work.

Risks and experimentation were a huge part of my undergraduate experience, but I had failed to really find a way to bring this into my teaching. This reminder of what it means to just play resonated with me and almost gave me permission in a way to allow my students to play, despite our time constraints.

Students at Hinckley Elementary School have a lot of pressure on them to find the right answer. As a school of excellence for the past 11 years in the state of Ohio, we have high achievement on standardized tests. There are also many pressures from parents to succeed that starts at the younger levels and follows them to high school. I have many students who don't like to mess up, and this fear keeps them from experimenting. Play is something that helps to break this anxiety. My first experience was with a Keith Haring project. I was inspired by his process when reading Teaching Meaning in Artmaking and truly the next lesson I tried it out with my fifth graders. We learned about the process of using stream-of-consciousness and armed with markers

and cheap paper students began drawing. I had an unlimited amount of paper and markers for them to encourage them to draw over and over again without fear of using up materials. There was no right or wrong or step-by-step answers. Students were able to just draw. This was a new experience for many as students said they were usual told what to draw and some did struggle at first. It took a lot of encouragement and an atmosphere that felt safe to make the activity a success. This play activity was then used as a catalyst to draw with chalk on black paper and then to eventually compose one painting made up of images discovered through the process. As Connor says, "It gets you to what idea you are trying to get out."

After a couple of experiences the students are able to identify play. Emma says, "It's sorta like a rough draft in writing class, but it's art." Quade thinks "it gets you more to like it" and brought up the example of when they used play-dough before they made their gargoyles. "That was playing" he said. Many grade levels have had time to play with the play-dough and experiment before they start their final ceramic piece. Sometimes, like in Quade's case, I ask them to figure out a certain problem and with others I let them have time to create whatever their imagination can devise. When third grade students made Ohio wildlife animals out of clay, they buzzed around the room with way more energy when they made their three-dimensional habitats for their animals. Normally clay is the only material that generates cheers. There were no restrictions or step by step directions to follow, only an abundance of materials and choices to make. This chance to play with paper, markers, and found objects created an exciting atmosphere that was memorable for students, as they are still talking about it. I often incorporate play into my plans when I know there will be 10 minutes or so

leftover, and have found this small time that usual seems wasteful to become productive and enriching. Students are getting something out of it because “learning begins with creative, deeply personal, primary process play” (Gude 2007 p. 7)

Choices

The Keith Haring project started with play and continued as a lesson where students had to make choices. In their journal entries, students wrote that at first it was challenging to draw whatever came to their mind, because they are always prompted at school. Allowing them to find their own solution created an awesome show of all subjects in their paintings from hamburgers to peace signs to imaginary monsters. They worked so hard because they owned their drawing. Choices and freedom was brought up immediately when asked from students what is the difference between art now and art before the big idea. They discussed that there are choices in their art, freedom to move around the room for supplies, and to talk to their neighbors about their work. When I set up my classroom the fall after I began OSU, I wanted to create a space that cultivated the big idea and making meaning in artwork. Stations of supplies we set up so students could use them when needed without asking and tables were situated so students could see each other’s work and have conversation with each other. Quade said, “It’s more independent, but in a good way. It’s not like your doing the whole project by yourself. Like, well you get to pick what you want to do.” Connor and Arianna commented on how projects use to be more specific and guided. Before in a project, they had to draw specific tasks, but now they had a choice in what to draw. Isabella feels like the management of the room gives her the ability to have choice. “If I’m stuck on something I can talk to my person sitting next to me and they can give me

an idea to work off of.” Both my third and fourth graders brought up gargoyles more than any other project in our conversation. It was a clay project. We learned about the history, the function, and looked how they are used in contemporary buildings and then students were asked to create their own version for our town, Hinckley. I didn’t give them specific directions, only general tips and tricks of hand-building with clay. I’ve been concerned about this lesson because the visual results have not been spectacular, but in light of talking with the kids, I now see they get results from having to make their own creative choices.

To have choices in artwork is something I try to do with each grade level. My kindergarten class is no exception, and I had to fight a small battle with the aids over it. After the lesson, the students would begin their project. Anytime a student would deviate from the example, the aids would charge in and change the work. Sometimes this meant actually doing the work for them or having the student start over. Since I was a rookie in this new way of teaching and the aids were new to not copying art projects, I asked if the kindergartners and I could just be by ourselves for awhile to build a culture of choice and creativity. A successful project done with choice was when kindergartners were asked to build a house out of pre-cut paper shapes. I did not show them the triangle and square house and I am so glad I didn’t! They created mansions, garages, dog houses, and two or three story houses. Students and I are learning together through this new process. “[S]tudents will develop creative decision-making skills because, rather than executing projects pre-determined by their teacher, students will be responsible for generating the ideas regarding the subject matter and problem solving the production of their art” (Gnezda p. 50).

Not every project has complete free reign. Some have limited choices and some projects have results where they all look the same. It is still a new program and I am a teacher still in transition. My third grade students feel this transition. Lilia said, "You give us different options for some things." They did bring up that they would like more freedom and how I limit something like the colors of paint I give them. Complete freedom to them is "giving us a lump of clay and letting us make whatever we want!" Megan is right to want to get the chance to play, but there also has to be boundaries in place to direct the students learning.

Boundaries

I've been learning to create boundaries that fit the lesson and fit the age group. Some boundaries are needed for practical reasons like space and material limitations. Other boundaries don't restrict students, but ask them to be more creative with their limitations (Walker p.75). It takes time to learn the right boundaries to set for each lesson, each grade level and each individual class. Artistic maturity levels are all different and thus the framework must be different. Before Teaching Artmaking with Meaning, I would often plan lessons according to the instructional limitations I had and then try to fit in everything else after. The lesson would start with wanting to teach students about line or needing a two-dimensional project because I was out of three-dimensional storage space. Now, I let the meaning come as a first priority and the other things, like teaching skills, time, and space always seem to work out. While making masks fifth grade students asked me where they were going to put them. I probably look like a deer in headlights as I had no idea and no go to spot. We worked it out, and even with a very crowded floor, the meaning endured.

The meaning also came through because I kept the objectives to a short list. They could keep a short list of objectives in mind when having to make choices about materials and what to use to express their meaning. “When students work in response to a specific site, they too need objectives; otherwise, the experience is likely to be too open-ended, engendering confusion rather than productivity” (Walker 30).

The fourth grade students did an Andy Goldsworthy lesson for the past two years. The first year, we made personal connections, built a knowledge base about the artist and his work, and then went outside. I was disappointed with the results. Students kept trying to make an identifiable object, like a tree or pyramid from sticks. Walker says, “the teacher enables students to make more purposeful aesthetic decisions, thereby directing students toward conceptual concerns for expression” (p. 74). The following year I knew I needed to create aesthetic boundaries. We looked at Goldsworthy’s work and noticed how he created shapes or lines and most of his work was either negative or positive. Students were to think about the assignment in a more close minded way, but this restriction also meant they had to problem solve. Students were asked to use the materials found on site and to focus the design on positive and negative shapes and lines. These limitations took away the trials to create a picture and dove the students deeper into the material. “Even when artmaking is spontaneous, specific objective are necessary. Too much freedom can be as inhibiting as too many restrictions” (Walker p. 31).

Connections

The Teaching Artmaking with Meaning class helped me to see how to nurture the big idea by connecting the big idea the student’s lives. I would have to use two hands

to tell how many times students asked me that fall why we are doing a power point and why can't they just make art. The new way of teaching was an adjustment for my students in many ways, and they let me know about it. Not only was this a new way of making art, but I was also a new art teacher for them. I fought many battles, especially with the upper elementary students over power points and reflection, but eventually won their favor with projects that they were interested in and could talk about. When I asked my focus group if they liked the big idea, without hesitation, they yelled "YES!" Colleen said before in art class, she was told exactly what to do. "I just really like how you always get to learn about what you are doing because [before] she would tell you exactly what to do and then you would be done. It wouldn't be like learning about that artist it would just be like... remember doing this. I don't know why we did that." Colleen couldn't make connections before to her life and so the art became just another assignment. "Making relevant and meaningful art can foster in students a sense of art's significance in their lives" (Gnezda p.49).

The importance of making personal, artistic, and real-life connections is evident in the outcome of the work and the discussions we have afterwards. I asked my students to name a big idea we have studied this year and many answered with Greek art. I incorporated Greek art into the Heroes unit, and although we learned a lot about the culture of Greece and we talked about our heroes, the connection was not made between the two. "Knowledge figures prominently in the depth and quality of exploration and expression in artmaking: the results of student artmaking around a big idea informed only by surface knowledge are likely to be disappointing" (Walker p. 46-47). I was disappointed, and now I need to refine the unit to make more meaningful

connections. I didn't have authentic learning, only a bunch of artworks with Greek influences in them. "Authentic learning requires that the meaning construction involved in learning be relevant to students' lives and based on real-world connections" (Gnezda p.49).

Reflections help to make connections for students and I've slowed down my pace. We take time to pause and consider what the art means, whether it is our art or the art of other artists. I post these reflective writings with the art in the hall to demonstrate there is more to the art than meets the eye.

Making Meaning

My students and I jumped into storytelling as our first big idea and haven't looked back. It was an easy way for me to organize my year of lessons. Skills, history, and mediums all just seemed to fit it in so organically. Once I know my big ideas, research for them was easy because I had focus. I could look through idea books, attend the state convention, and buy materials with the big ideas in mind and was able to create a curriculum that was well-rounded. I have definitely improved teaching the big idea through experiencing the OSU program, but the Teaching Artmaking with Meaning class set the foundation for me. It deepened my understanding for making meaning for the student that was sincerely personal and connected to their everyday life. A unit wasn't just about Egyptian art or architecture, but answering how do those topics relate to the student's life? "Artmaking involves problems--technical, aesthetic, stylistic, conceptual, and expressive. How to paint is a technical problem, but what to paint is a conceptual problem which extends beyond subject matter" (Walker p. 49). I began to think in terms of conceptual problems. We looked at how Egyptian art told stories, and then created

pieces that told stories about the student's lives. Instead of just copying architecture, students created a design for a house that related to the nature landscape they had built. They also could invent any imaginative parts to their house, like underwater elevators. Imagination and discovery was a natural result of using the big idea. When answers are right or wrong in so many of their other classes, and high test scores is something that is valued, students often look for reassurance that their art project is correct. From project to project, I've tried to create an environment for possibilities and creativity. When students ask if they are right or wrong we have dialogue about their choices. I strive to use "dialogue to collaboratively construct a safe space for incipient creative urges to be nurtured, rather than being denied and smothered" (Gude p. 32).

A successful project that created meaning was that of my unit plan that I developed in the Designing Meaningful Curriculum course. With the foundation laid and the attention to details learned in the curriculum course, we embarked on a mask making project. The topic was concealing and revealing the self. Students built knowledge by working in a booklet and we studied artists Louise Bourgeois and Chuck Close. We even looked at pop culture characters who relate to this topic like Hannah Montana and Spiderman. With a table full of supplies, research in their booklets, and blank white masks, students dove into the artmaking process. The results have not been the most impressive display of artistic talent, but it has been the most impressive display of artistic meaning. Connor liked the mask "cause you could throw all what you are on a face and I thought that was real interesting." I asked him which project does he think he will keep the longest and he answered, "What's that one swirly pot we did? The coil pot. I think I'm going to keep the mask longer than that because the mask

describes me and that... it's just a pot." A special education aid, who has been going to art class for many years says, "These kids are going to keep those masks. They are going to be in their memento box or their parents memento box because they are....they're a piece of art. It's just not...it's a piece of art you want to keep. They're awesome." Making meaning beat out a clay project, and that's a true sense of confirmation, as clay is the only project that gets kids to stand up and cheer. They are now cheering for their meaning. Isabella says, "It makes you feel proud" and Arianna chimes in, "It makes you feel special."

Continuing Education

This change has propelled my classroom into a "real" contemporary art room where students are learning, not just following directions or going step by step. Students are thinking and engaged, and they have engaged a new attitude me. We are not just decorating hallways anymore. I need to continue to educate my administrators and other teachers about teaching meaning in artmaking, and the in and outs of bringing it to life. Play is a topic I will continue to use and loosen up to. As my school community understands what is being taught in my classroom, I believe some of the pressures will be lifted from production of display artworks. I will not worry as much about product and turn my worries and pressure to process and content. The pressure of supplies and money also inhibited my ability to let kids loose and experiment, and this is something I need to plan for so that I can let go. Buying the play-dough helped with this anxiety, and since I have invested in Toobers and Zots, creative paint rollers, and other supplies that supports experimentation and play. My balance between

choices and boundaries is something that I will always be working at and will learn through trial and error.

I also need to educate the community on my art program and the meaning that is being made in our artwork. Of course, the aids are my most knowable source because they are in the classes every week and are witnessing the change first hand. After a conversation with my principal (a new principal from my first year) I learned that administration themselves are a little unsure of what to expect from a contemporary art program. Having fun, experiencing many types of art, and doing cross-curricular projects was his summary of his expectations. It is my goal to help administration understand the expectations of a contemporary art program and to help communicate the successes to teachers, parents, and the community. The principal can see the art program is changing. "It's definitely not how I learned art in elementary school that's for sure....I like the thought of having a big idea or theme that you are creating things around and you have multiple classes doing that to add to a bigger picture." I actually took a break from making meaning when the music teacher asked me to support his music performance based on the ocean. We cranked out artwork quickly and many of them looked similar. My principal brought up the ocean as a great unit I did with the big idea. After explaining the differences between the ocean theme and the heroes big idea, I saw a lightbulb go off over his head. "I get it" he said. Now I have support to help the community "get it."

Conclusion

Making meaning in artmaking has being a positive experience in my classroom that blossoms from playing and gives students choices. I am learning the appropriate

boundaries to make. Meaning is formed and nurtured from making personal connections and building a knowledge base. My goals are to become more comfortable with play and continue to balance the relationship between choices and boundaries. My students are enthusiastic about the big idea and making meaning, and I will continue to develop unit plans that support these ideas. I am a teacher now who has focus and do not feel overwhelmed by all that there is to teach in an art room. Letting in others, like administration and parents on the great things that are happening is the next step I am ready to make. Making meaning has changed my classroom into a “real classroom” and is changing more minds than just my own.

Chapter 3: Designing the Curriculum

Start slow, they said. Take this big idea and start small. So when I began teaching my first year at Highland Local Schools, I applied the big idea to my elementary students, an age group I had very little curriculum resources on, and let my vast file folders of lessons dictate my high school curriculum. A year later, with my feet wet as a high school teacher, and a new understanding of planning a unit with the class, “Designing Meaningful Art Curriculum”, I spent my summer outlining a curriculum based on the big idea of identity. In “Investigating the Culture of Curriculum”, Olivia Gude (2000) says about building a curriculum, “It is an eclectic, postmodern approach to curriculum construction--pick through curriculum artifacts, refurbish what is still useful, discard what is no longer necessary, introduce entirely new contents when needed.” This process I took to heart and is how I started. It has changed me, my students, and the outcomes we discovered together.

Content and Purpose

The art education class, “607 Designing Meaningful Art Curriculum”, asked essential questions such as, *What is curriculum?* and *What does a curriculum unit designed around big ideas look like?* To investigate these questions and others we read a variety of readings and watched the PBS series, *Art:21, Art of the 21st Century*. We had dialogue with our cohort via discussion boards and designed a curriculum unit that reflected our new understanding.

The Old Ways

It is through all these readings and discussions that I really began to put together all the pieces and parts and many light bulbs or ah-ha moments occurred that was then directly implemented into my classroom. I had some of pieces and parts, but could not see the whole picture before. In undergrad, I wrote a unit plan based on Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe’s *Understanding by Design*. I got an A+ on the assignment. However, when I look over that unit plan, I can see that I had not had the ah-ha moment. The class was a methods class for all educators, and was not specific for art educators. My experience at OSU has made the connections I needed between the methods and the subject matter. In my old unit plan, I can see I had not quite understood how to plan a curriculum based on enduring or big ideas. My enduring ideas and essential questions were more about what I wanted students to know through an entire curriculum. For example, one of my essential questions was “What are contemporary artists creating?” Yes, this is something I want my students to know at the end of my course, but this is not a strong essential question. I was using PBS’s Art 21 and thinking about a 21st Century curriculum, but now I actually have the tools to

implement these learning goals in an impressionable way. Now, my essential questions are more like, “What words make you feel powerless?” and “How do you describe your culture identity?” We then look at contemporary artists who are working with the same topic. The enduring ideas and essential questions are about the students. Before I was pushing the art world onto the students, now, I bring the art into my students’ world.

Between my undergraduate class and my teaching experience, I’d lost some of the current methods. When I glance at the “Designing Meaningful Curriculum” syllabus, I notice in the margin during week seven I have listed five art projects that go with the big idea of “self”. In the beginning, I was planning on designing five lessons that were all extensive art projects that would each take multiple days to complete. As I went through the unit planning process that Professor Eisenhower had designed for us, I realized that only one lesson out of the five was actual artmaking. The rest were about building personal connections, life knowledge building, artistic knowledge building, and drawing conclusions after the artmaking had taken place. In my initial thinking, I had totally skipped out on all these parts. Did that mean I was skipping out in my classroom as well? Had I gotten tainted over the past four years of my teaching by the pressure to deliver art project after art project. I feel like I lost the most current methods by falling into the style of the teachers around me and the expectations of parents, administrators and even students. In *Art Curriculum Influences: A National Survey*, the researchers looked at teachers who have been teaching for less than 7 years to see what influenced their curriculum. They concluded that educators tend to teach what or how they have been taught as a K-12 student. In my experience, I was taught art project to art project, no knowledge building or contemporary art, which, according to this survey is the lowest

influence on art curriculum. I remember in my first art history class in undergrad our professor asked us to name a contemporary artist. I couldn't name one. This is scary, and scary that I almost fell into the same routine. In my first unit plan based on enduring ideas in undergrad, I did have knowledge building, although, I called everything that wasn't art production "activities" and my essential questions are not sound essential questions. The lightbulb was flickering at least. I lost some energy once in the work force and out of academia. It has been during the curriculum class at OSU though, that lightbulbs and ah-ha moments really started to happen in a way that stuck and stayed lit. I worked hard on an outline for my high school Art 1 class that included personal connections, life and artistic knowledge building. In designing my curriculum, I feel like I know how to fit together the pieces and parts that started in undergrad and is now developing into a true contemporary unit plan.

The New Design Process

I am responsible for what the students learn. As an art educator, I just don't implement a curriculum, I design it. As a result of this course, I worked on my curriculum for my Art 1 class starting in the summer. In my outline, I created two grids. The first unpacks the big idea, the topic, and essentials questions. It was a concise way for me to see at a glance what we are going to work on this year. The second grid was divided into the big idea project, sketchbook homework, in class skill and play, and knowledge building.

I took the file folders from last year, and really edited, revisited, purged, added, and reworked them to fill in my outline. Many lessons I was doing were good lessons, but they had no context. Filling in my chart, I could clearly see how to put the pieces

and parts together to form a cohesive curriculum divided into units that my students understood and could follow. I didn't have to start from scratch, but just fill in the holes.

Many holes in the outline were the big idea projects and knowledge build. I had plenty of skill builds and even some play. I had a small start on contemporary artists, but added many more knowledge building now that I had an enduring idea and essential questions to work around. Some of the major projects from last year even became sketchbooks this year. One example was magazine color collages. Last year, we spent so much time on them. They were beautiful in the end, but what exactly did the students learn? I was able to see how insignificant the lesson was compared to the amount of time we spent on it. In the end, it was not worth the time we were spending in class, but the underlying lesson I still believed in, so an out of class sketchbook assignment is where it belongs. The projects will continue to evolve and deepen. Some will become out of date. One such project is a vertical letter drawing, based off the tread of t-shirts that split words up and take away spaces. A student commented on how it was a dying tread, and soon the lesson will have to die too.

Some of the lessons are hard to let go. You get lots of compliments on lessons that sometimes have no bearing on the students' interests or ideas. Some lessons you know are easy set up and will keep kids busy. I dropped a project off at a library for a show and was explaining what the piece meant. The woman's eye lit up and suddenly she had a new appreciation for the piece. It didn't have the shock and awe over skill, but it had something that the woman could take from the piece besides shock--a meaning. This will take some getting used to by me, my students, and even the other teachers I work with, but it's something worth getting used to, as the shock and awe

effect always tend to wear off. Meaning is something that stays. It's the student's meaning that was invested, and that won't wear off.

Influence in the Curriculum

My curriculum was outlined, but not set in stone when I began the school year. I had students brainstorm what identity is to unpack our big idea. Even though I had a basic plan already, I have been able to fold in the students thoughts as well, which makes the curriculum more about them. Stewart and Walker say there cannot be a universal list of enduring ideas for all students. It will "depend upon judgements made at the local level about the relevance of the enduring idea in regard to specific student populations, art understandings, meaningfulness beyond the classroom, connections to contemporary culture, and prospects for future significance in students' lives" (2005, p.36). This curriculum is for my students who are here and now. As they change, so does the curriculum. It connects to their life experiences, where they live, and the values of the community.

The community is between Akron and Cleveland on a long highway, 94, that houses three small townships, Sharon, Granger and Hinckley. These traditional farming townships make up Highland Local Schools. About 10 years ago, families looking for a quaint neighborhood setting with lots of land and a small town feel close to their jobs in the city began moving to the area. The enrollment of the district splurged, adding 1,000 new students, and consequently building a new high school and shifting buildings. The traditional rural farming community is now sprouted with homes of entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, CPA's, and other highly qualified skills creating a culture of small town

values with high educational expectations. Along with the influx of students, the school has grown in stature, with a rating of Excellence from the state for the past 11 years.

I began working at Highland High School in 2009. The school was built in 2004, and the three beautiful art studios helped lure me into the job, as I was teaching middle school in Onsted, a small rural community in Michigan. I quickly was able to recognize the culture of the high school, as I had just been in a different school setting for two years. For the first homework assignment, I had 95% of my students turn in work and was floored at this high percentage. The expectations of students from parents, teachers, and administrators is high. 85% of our parents both have a college degree, and college is the goal of the majority of our graduates. There are also opportunities for students at the Medina Career Center in landscaping, automotive, culinary, and more. All students are expected to plan and prepare for a successful future. Along with academics, students are involved in many after-school activities including sports, band, volunteer organizations, and speech. Pressure and stress on students to achieve in school and their chosen activity is common in many families. Other pressures that affect our community are class, family structures, and the economy. The clash of a farming community with white collar can be seen in our students segregating themselves into classes. The most common concern I see from students is their family. Whether it is divorce, new blended families, or over-worked parents, their home life is often transparent. The pressure to succeed seems even greater now with the economy, as parents are banking on scholarships and grants for college monies. Our school has failed multiple levies, and families are asked to pay for many extras in school. Through

all the pressures of a rural almost suburbia area, the students make Highland High School a school of excellence that the community is proud to call theirs.

The community is reflected in many of the topics we study. Status is one of the topics that students will have a lot to say about. From clothing labels to snowboard logos, the materials things students own have a lot to do with their identity. At my first school, this is a topic students would have little information or interest in pursuing an artmaking experience about. My middle school students would have done better with a topic such as heritage, as most families in that area had been there for many generations. A curriculum that is invested in the lives of students will be catered specifically to the lives of students, and might not stand the test of time or place.

The school has been hit hard emotionally the past two years, with fatal teen car crashes, suicide, a tragic sports injury, the sudden death of a teacher, and a school fire. This has created a sense of closeness and a sense of alertness. It has also created many emotions, questions, and reactions for students to deal with at a young age. These experiences have shaped our student body, and offered teaching moments for students and teachers alike that have become a part of our hidden curriculum. In many projects, there are references to these events. The projects have allowed the students to have space to express, question or reflect. One such topic was what or who inspires you. In another project, students designed a memorial or monument, and many references to these events were made.

Involvement in the Curriculum

The students who worked with me to research their response to this new curriculum are a representation of my Art 1 class. This is an introductory class that is

needed as a prerequisite to many other art classes. For some, they will eventually be AP students and for others, this is the last art class they will ever have. I have developed relationships with each of them, whether over art, their interests outside my classroom, our service learning experience, or through our experiences as a Highland community. The students have been the guinea pigs in my curriculum that we are designing. They represent the range of skill level in my class as well as grades 9, 10, and 11. Some are high achieving students in all their facets and others will work when interested and need purpose besides a grade. I imagine a few will pursue a career in the arts while others will just appreciate it in their daily lives.

These students felt like I was thinking about their daily lives and interests when creating the curriculum, but still felt like I was the expert, or as Mikey put it “You’re the artist.” They also felt like I change the curriculum based on their skill level more than their interests. Samantha believes that next year’s Art 1 class will probably do different projects, and this lets me know they feel the lessons are not stagnate, but “dynamic” as Kiba describes them. They also believed I was inspired by current events, artists, and art education literature for my lesson ideas.

I am happy I have not fallen into the common approach of teaching as I had been taught in K-12, but still need to make improvements. I’d like to make the students feel more engaged in the curriculum beyond just skill level. Many students commented on how much they liked the exam, because they got to pick the media and skills that they used to create an art piece about time. I’d like to give students this option more, as they created some really great works of art for the exam. There still is room in the curriculum

to build skills, but, as I've discovered from my students, they want to then use those skills.

The Skill and Knowledge Building in the Curriculum

After diving into making meaning in art in the elementary school, I knew I no longer wanted to spend a majority time on skill building in my high school class. I had a taste of the results with the younger students, and wanted to expand it into my high school curriculum. I still believed in the importance of teaching skills, but now connect those skills to a project with meaning, and pace them in a concise manner. Samantha is a student who wants to improve her skills to help create meaning. "I think they are both very important to it, because without the skill building we couldn't do it and without us, it's just kinda gonna be something on paper."

Sketchbook assignments are always a struggle with completion and motivation. They have to fit into the context of the class and not be busy work. Often, a grade is not enough to motivate students. My students needed a reason beyond *I am the teacher and this is what I say* and I needed a reason beyond *you should be assigning homework because you are the teacher*. This brought me to decide to make all sketchbook assignments a skill build that directly related to the assignments in class. Each sketchbook assignment builds skills that will be used with the in-class meaning assignment. Charlie has had a lot of success on his sketchbook assignments. "I feel like it helps me when we do stuff. Like, we'll do a sketchbook assignment and then do something, an actual project, that relates to both the sketchbook assignment and what we are learning about in class."

The other category that I now refer to in my classroom is *knowledge building*. The knowledge building is where we explore the topics, artists, and do our research for the project. In the Designing Meaningful Curriculum unit plan, we label some lessons *personal connections*. I have labeled this type of lesson as knowledge building for my students, as we are gaining knowledge about ourselves, and “without personal connections to the big idea, learning becomes more of an exercise than an engagement” (Class Handout p.4). Everything that isn’t directly related to our identity, like value scales, is still related to creating the artwork about our identity, so in the end, every assignment has purpose that relates to our big idea. As Kiba told me, “Everything we’ve done is related to something else.” She then went through her work and pointed and explained how one project helped her complete another.

When reflecting on my curriculum, I wasn’t sure if I was effectively relating the connections to my students. Could my students “sense, examine, and explain the structure of the curriculum” as Gude (nd) says in *Rubric for a Quality Art Curriculum*. In my head, I understood everything clearly and how everything fit together, but did my students? They did. “I know there’s a reason for everything,” Samantha said. After a semester of this curriculum, students did understand that their work could never be called “busy work.” In fact, they let me know when work assigned doesn’t add up for them. When I had to take some time off in the fall, they worked with value by drawing pumpkins. I have not heard the end of it for assigning those pumpkins. The skill build was too long, and it never developed into a larger idea. The students did not do a meaning project with the skills gained, so the purpose was lost on them and so was their attention and behavior. Mikey says it quite frankly, ““If they have meaning you

want to do them, if they don't, then you're just like why?" His motivation is directly linked. When asked why he wasn't working in class, he told me he didn't see the point. If he couldn't see the connection, he lost motivation. In the future, I want to continue to develop my rationales, and share the reasons with my students to help field the questions of why are we learning this, and for them to become agents of their own work also. It will also be a way for me to make sure I am not assigning anymore pumpkins.

Contemporary artists in the Curriculum

With the anthem of starting small still in my head, I decided to show an *Art 21* video every Thursday to add to our knowledge building. I heard the idea from another graduate student and thought this is something I can do right away. I have adopted the idea of how important these artists are in the curriculum, and the videos have allowed me to expose my students to many artists quickly, no matter my prep time or stack of grading to get through. Every Thursday, students watch one artist that is related to our class, whether in idea or technique, and they write down one idea or quote they heard. They also draw a thumbnail of a visual idea. We haven't had formal discussion yet, just watch, write, and move on to our project. Most artists generate some kind of informal discussion, between me and the students or just the students themselves. I was hoping it was making an impact, but had no idea until talking with students. I asked each what do we learn about in art, and almost every time the reply was we learn about artists. Many students shared with me that they tell their parents about these artists who are *cool*, *weird*, or even *sick*. It has changed their opinion of what an artist is. Samantha gives her new definition of an artist as "Anyone who's inspired enough to put it on paper or whatever they are doing." Kiba says an artist is "Someone that can make you think

with their work in someway.” Next year I’d like to prepare discussion questions for each artist like we practiced in the “Designing Meaningful Curriculum” class. They will open up dialogue and be related to the key concepts. I’ll have students write in their sketchbooks first, and then share and discuss with each other in class.

Meaningful Artwork in the Curriculum

Once the skill and knowledge is in place, we can now start to put all the pieces together. As Mikey says, “We need the skills first, but when you have the meaning it makes it faster and easier to get where you are going.” We are on our way now, and I have observed my students working this year on their projects in a much more determined and motivated way. They ask more questions and work ‘in the zone’ more than my classes from a year before. “I like the meaning ones more.....it’s easier if you have meaning for a project.....It’s something you’re going for and not winging it like normal.” I found it enlightening when Mikey said “winging it like normal.” To have to think and defend his work in an artist statement was a goal that he took on, and keep him focused. Charlie put forth more effort too. “It’s like you actually put more thought into it than just tracing some dude upside down, but like making something like that is personal to you has more meaning. Makes you work a little bit harder I guess.... It makes the art more rewarding.” This reward for the students has not always been perfect, but we are definitely evolving in the right direction. When planning, I’m always gonna keep in mind what Samantha said, “I like how we apply us to it, because other times they just set something in front of us and are like okay, concentrate on the values, but the can has nothing to do with me.” That’s what happened with the pumpkins. I set

the pumpkins in front of them, but it was only a novelty because of the season. It had nothing to do with the students.

An artist statement is something else new to my curriculum this year. I ask students to talk about their decisions in their artwork or what experiences lead up to their choices. They can also write about problems they ran into, how they solved them, or what they would do differently. During the project they know they will have to write about their decisions, and if they can't, then they haven't met the learning goals. Michael talks about this process. "You have to put your own meaning into it and you have to back it up. You just can't say, "Oh this means that," you have to actually provide a statement that actually connects it." The artist statements have also helped validate the artwork and created a sense of pride for the students. For Sam, the artist statements have also helped her consider other artworks in a new way. "I think art has a lot more meaning for me right now because you had us write those statements. Like, I look at something and think there is meaning, but I didn't actually believe it [before], so now there is a lot more to it...I knew there was something behind it but I just didn't really think about it."

The artist statements has also kept students accountable and focused on making meaning. I've heard students comment to other students, "How are you going to explain that?" The class has become a small community, and they push each other to defend their ideas. It has also derailed inappropriate art. When a student wanted to make their inspirational figure sculpture hold a can, which gave the idea of alcohol, I asked them if they could write about it in their artist statement. The student couldn't, so

he reworked his plan. The students also hold me accountable when they are not prepared to make meaning, and it shows in their work, words, and behavior.

The Chance to Play

During a recent printmaking project my students were very restless. Many students were off task, I was frustrated, and the work was taking them longer than necessary. Every teacher has many reasons for things not going right. Too many snow days, not a regular schedule, stuck inside too much in bleak Northeast Ohio, full moon and the list goes on. I had these excuses until I started interviewing students. I then realized they were bored. They didn't see the connection to the big idea, because I dropped the ball. I did not have any knowledge build for them beyond artists. The printmaking process and perspective were explored for skill build, but the lesson did not make personal connections. I wanted them to really play and experiment with the materials, but didn't give them a safe place to play, like in their sketchbooks, so they were timid, unsure, and the work was not great. Many were just too worried about getting it "right," and how I wanted them to look, as this is part of the culture and pressure of the school.

Playing in work is something I increased this year. Kiba even said having a chance to experiment with the materials is something she will take away from this class. It actually changed the way she thought about art and she's had more success than she thought she would. "This sounds cheesy, but we can all do art, you know what I mean? Because when I used to think of art literally meaning to draw. I can't draw, so it was like the projects we do make it a lot easier. I think that idea that anyone can do the projects." I took the time from production to have students just work with materials in

their sketchbooks. I had to make very clear they were not getting grades on results, and to keep classroom management, they were getting points for working. The students got a chance to really understand materials, their own skills, and take away the pressure they feel to perform. I was able to observe true understanding and growth in their final projects that would not have come about without this open invitation to play first.

Where the Curriculum Goes from Here

I started this process by taking Gude's (nd) advice to "pick through curriculum artifacts, refurbish what is still useful, discard what is no longer necessary, introduce entirely new contents when needed." This is a process that must always be in circulation. If it stops, the curriculum is no longer dynamic, but becomes outdated and not relatable for students. The lesson may be a great lesson, but if it not relatable for students, it's purpose and strength is lost. What works for today's students may not work for tomorrow's students. I also hope to continue my own personal research about contemporary artists through literature, museum visits, and video series like the PBS series, *Art:21: Art of the 21st Century*. As well as keeping up with artists, I will also keep up with students and what topics they have an interest in pursuing in a work of art. As a member of NAEA, I will also use the publications and journals as a resource for new ideas and strictly edit what I find on the Internet. As I continue to teach, I will continue to build and grow as a curriculum designer.

Conclusion

Teaching this year with this new and dynamic curriculum has been a positive experience. I feel like I've come a long way since my methods class in undergrad and

the influences in the profession. It started with the ah-ha moment of setting a pace in the curriculum to include all parts; knowledge, skill, play, and meaning-making. No more sprinting from project to project. Once organized, I could effectively implement the lessons in any order to accommodate the chaos of a high school schedule, but still stick to a cohesive plan that students could follow. The lessons were also fluid to match the students interests and life experiences. The students and I both had choices and we're not locked into a permanent list. Students began to see the connections in all assignments, and this created motivation to complete work. Contemporary artists were a major eye opening experience for students and made them consider art in a new way. Making meaning in the work has become essential to students' success, and we hold each other accountable to it. Play has found a place in the curriculum, and allowed students a safe place to create. The curriculum is exciting to teach, and as my students demonstrated to me, exciting to learn.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

It is hard to believe how much changes in the first few years of teaching. As a teacher with just a few years of experience, the program at OSU has been able to guide my change and development into a contemporary art teacher. The key changes that have occurred in my understanding about art teaching are that everything I assign has a purpose students and I can explain, connections to the students are a priority, time in class is no longer production driven but understanding driven, and the value of making meaning had become the cornerstone of my teaching philosophy.

Every project, each assignment, and every video has a part in a bigger picture now in my classroom. Each part of the curriculum has a purpose to ultimately teach students a greater understanding of art and what it means in their lives. Whether building knowledge of artists, the big idea, of building skills to express the big idea, every bit adds up to a complete package. Through interviews with my high school students, I have discovered that they are able to see the purpose behind the work they do. I have developed into the habit of asking myself “why?” Students often ask, “Why are we learning this?” and it is a valid question that I am compelled to answer now and hold myself accountable to in my planning. This concept had spread when I assess work as well. What is the purpose of this assignment and am I assessing that purpose? If I give a rationale, I can teach it and students accept learning it, otherwise they won’t let me hear the end of just drawing pumpkins because its fall. Their questions are relentless and I will be ready to field them all. I can also defend my classroom as a real classroom to any naysayer and change minds about art education. My enthusiasm will be contagious because I have purpose beyond teaching students about a line or shape.

The experience of teaching in two different school districts has revealed to me how important it is to understand the students in your classroom, and to really respect their life worlds. When I understand the life world of my students, I can begin to make connections for them. To be able to connect what is being learned in class to the student’s life is a rewarding experience for all involved.

I am a prime example of a learner who needs connections to my own life. The big idea was first introduced to me in undergraduate college, but the connections to my

subject matter were never made, and consequently the methods was lost on me until OSU was able to make the connection of theory to my classroom.

Students have been able to make connections to the events in their lives. I have been giving my students topics and knowledge building activities to help them generate ideas. When students take this knowledge and make connections with personal experiences in their artwork is when I feel successful. There has been much tragedy in the district, and through the process of making meaning in art I have seen references to these events in their work. They never had a project that was about these events specifically, but because the project were about the students and their lives, these events naturally came out.

I used to feel so rushed and pressured to produce artwork. Like my room was a factory and I was being measured on output of product. Now, I can justify to administrators, teachers, and parents how and why I spend my time. Before, I couldn't explain why we were spending time playing with play-dough. Now I know how valuable time spent playing with a material is. I don't feel guilty about not producing the cute stuff anymore, and I feel proud of the students meaningful artwork and experiences. Not everything is about a finished piece. Instead of time fillers that do just that, fill time, I use all extra time to play. Time that used to be wasteful is now productive and enhancing to my curriculum.

I find myself critiquing all other art lessons with an attitude of "Looks great but what does it mean?" I wanted to make meaning before in my first years of teaching but I didn't know how to make it happen. I now have the tools to implement meaning. The steps of knowledge building, skill building, and learning about contemporary artist take

the experience and break it down so students can achieve meaning in their work.

Cheering is no longer reserved for clay, but for all processes that allow the students to make meaning in their work.

What is contemporary today will not be tomorrow. To always stay current is a goal of mine. I plan to continue to edit my curriculum so that it is about student's today, and make connections for them that are present day. I have just started building my library of contemporary artists and will continue to build my knowledge of them and incorporate this content into my curriculum in exciting ways. Writing effective discussion questions and holding discussions in class is something I want to pursue. I learned recently that boundaries are something that students need in the artmaking processes, but choices is something students value. I will continue to pursue this balance of boundaries verse choices. A lot of it will be trial and error, and then reflecting on how to make the balance better. I have witnessed these past two years that small steps in teaching meaning make a big difference. I will keep taking these small steps in other areas like assessment and interpretation. Using limited criteria has been one small step I've taken with my assessment practice and I'm excited to see how I can keep redefining my classes.

Another goal of mine is to begin to communicate to the community, administration, and the other teachers in the building what is going on in my classroom. I still have questions on how to effectively do this and really change minds. I will begin with local publications, inviting people into my classroom, and working with the curriculum director. I also want to send home to parents more literature about what the

students are learning in art. Hopefully this will be a start that will lead me in the right direction.

This program has answered a lot of the questions I had when I began. As a teacher who believes in reflection as a tool for learning, I will keep reflecting of my practice and asking questions. I am still unsure about assessing elementary students. I am conflicted on how to assess a student on a simple three letter scale of unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and outstanding. My goal at the end of the day for them is to feel proud about their work and believe that they can engage in artmaking. I haven't figured out how to our assessment scale and my goals work together. I am also concerned about the assessment of art teachers in the state of Ohio. Everything right now seems to be pointing to standardized tests, but art is not tested. So what am I assessed on and who will be assessing me? Will they have the knowledge of the big idea? If they don't, I will welcome them into my classroom and show them the amazing things that are now happening!

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