

THE EXPLORATION OF SELF ACCEPTANCE AND DISCOVERY IN THE
ENVIRONMENT OF AN ART CLASSROOM

by

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CHAPTER 1



FIGURE 1. Student with clay pendant.

Introduction

For my applied project, I am focusing on the experience I had from my time student teaching at Clarke Middle School, research I conducted from the previous fall semester, and the exploration of a unit designed for middle school students in hopes of addressing issues relevant to socioeconomic status and encouraging the process of reflection on the self. It seems as if these three ideas are mutually exclusive, but they are actually integrated into one focus: the connection you as a teacher make with your students in the classroom.

Clarke Middle School: Setting

The setting at Clarke Middle School is one of circumstances that are uniquely diverse. The school is located in Athens, Georgia right outside of Five Points, a location in the community that is one of the most sophisticated and desired areas to live. Ironically, Clarke County School District is one of the poorest counties in the nation with a population over 100,000 people. The neighboring of extreme poverty and overflowing wealth contributes to the diverse demographic of students attending Clarke Middle School. Out of almost 600 students,

52% are African American, 32% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, 4% Multi-racial, and 2% Asian.

Twenty eight percent of the entire student body is considered “gifted”. When looking at records of test scores at Clarke Middle School, I found that 99.4% of the Caucasian students passed the reading/English test while 78.4% of the African American students passed. Almost ninety seven percent of the Caucasian students passed the math test and 67.2% of the African American students passed the same test (www.clarkek12.ga.us, June 30, 2012).

There are so many students at Clarke Middle School, and with limited resources and teachers the students are only able to come to art once every three days. This means that sometimes I saw students only once a week. The general class size was around twenty-five students and some classes reached up to almost thirty students. The large class sizes paired with limited sessions with the students in the art classroom made relationships and connections harder to make. Because of this aspect, my teaching strategies and lessons were meant to intentionally build on one another to provide as consistent of an experience that I could for all different types of students.

Building My Unit

I had the pleasure of working with Laura Lee Johnson during student teaching, and I could not have asked for a better placement. Not only is she a great teacher, but also she strongly believes in connecting to all of her students, and she shapes her lessons in order to do so. Her instruction is meaningful and enables students to think deeply about who they are through art. She takes the time to connect with the students individually; making art relevant to their lives and empowering them to believe in their skills as artists but, more importantly, believe in who they are as people. Self-reflection is incorporated into many of her lessons. This allows for a student to make connections between a piece of art they have seen or created and how it

represents them as a person. She helps her students to reflect deeply and to look into who they genuinely want to be as middle school students now, and eventually as adults. It is not just about art in her classroom. It is about celebrating who the students are as people and how they can express that through art.

For my unit, I focused on clay jewelry. Mrs. Johnson talked frequently about the importance of craftsmanship not only in the art that you make but also in yourself, and I wanted to focus on this same concept throughout my unit. I emphasized the craftsmanship necessary for working with clay in reference to the technical qualities, but also in the implementation of meaning into the work. Self-expression was focused on so that the students could practice looking into themselves deeply enough so that they were able to project parts of themselves onto a piece of art.

I believe that in order to connect with students, you have to first be genuine, and your lessons have to show this. The units must be about more than art. The foundation should be about life and everything that comes along with that; issues at home, hardships at school, confusion, growing up, responsibility, rejection and rebellion. My priority is to connect with my students in a way that enables them to think more positively about who they are and the talents and abilities that they have. I attempted to use the unit on clay jewelry, the knowledge I obtained from my time spent in Mrs. Johnson's classroom, the research from the past semesters, and additional research to shape my applied project into a journey of discovery that highlights the value of connecting with students.

The Art Classroom As An Environment

Establishing the art classroom as an environment for acceptance and understanding is necessary for education because students cannot begin to interact with art, interpret it, or engage

in any type of discussion involving aesthetics or art criticism if they do not feel accepted in the first place. It takes a lot of courage to go out on a limb and try to interpret art, especially in front of the whole class. We need to use the art classroom as a place to not only allow for deeper discovery of art through art criticism, interpretation, art history and aesthetics, but also as a place to address real issues including those caused by socioeconomic status. If we can find a way to free students of some of the stress, we can actually make room in their brains and hearts for them to not only learn about art, but also be fully engaged as well.

I believe that an environment can be created in an art classroom that is inclusive of cultural differences as well as changes over time in students' identity. So, within the reality of a diverse setting, how do I create and daily provide an environment in the art classroom that promotes an environment of respect, empowerment, inclusion, and individualism that will allow for deeper discussion and interaction with and about art?

“Old” Literature vs. “New” Literature

A review of the literature not only provided information regarding problems that come along with a low socioeconomic status, but also highlighted the fact that the main thing standardized tests indicate are a person's socioeconomic status. Test critics commonly agree that assessments used for “high stakes decisions” such as college admission, solely evaluate a person's socioeconomic status (Sacket, 2009). This theory makes sense, seeing that people with a high status continue to make high scores on standardized tests, and people with a low socioeconomic status consistently receive low scores on the same tests. The location of a child's home, the schools in their district, their ethnicity, and their family life play huge roles in the success and drive within a student and in how well their funds of knowledge align with school expectations. I found that older articles and studies similar to ones described above view a low

socioeconomic status as a deficit or a problem that needed to be fixed. While the correlations between low test scores and low SES provided for me a foundation and an initial direction in my research, I ended up being drawn to more recent publications like *And Still We Rise* (Corwin, 2000) and *The Shame of a Nation* (Kozol, 2005) which focused more on empowerment and providing stories where youth were enabled to overcome despite whatever their circumstances may have been. I do not want to focus on a low SES being a negative concept in all circumstances, because I do not believe this to be true. I see negative effects of a life lived within the fences of a low SES just as I see negative effects of an affluent life filled with possessions that leave a person so empty inside. The newer literature helped me realize that there are no stereotypes. Youth from all walks of life are lost and confused. My priority as a teacher is not just to be what I think the students with a low SES may need, but to have the ability to transform myself into something that each individual student needs, no matter where they come from or what support they are receiving outside of school. The art classroom should be a place where all students feel acknowledged, sought out, and encouraged.

My Priorities as an Art Teacher

Teachers have the power to inspire students. It is so important for the student to feel accepted in the classroom as well as the content of what is being taught to be relevant. What you say about art has to outweigh the stresses of life and allow students to be involved and excited in your classroom. As the teacher, you have to instill hope into the hearts of students so that they can always feel it and know education is valuable even when they leave the doors of the school at the end of the day. A study conducted in a large urban school district in the south central region of the United States focused on the amount of time in a classroom that the teacher spends either actively teaching all of their students or working with them one on one, both of which

were less than half of the time (Waxman, 2001). We must enable students to defy the odds and reach past their socioeconomic status to achieve an education that will change things for them.

I believe that in the art classroom, the consistency, energy, encouragement, motivation and accountability will over time allow relationships to develop with students. I cannot count how many students ignored me until the sixth or seventh week at Clarke Middle School, and then all of a sudden wanted my help and my opinion. What I am saying is possible does take time, and I learned that to be true with my student teaching experience.

As an art teacher, my priority is to empower students to not be defined by their status, their ethnicity, or what neighborhood they come from. Unfortunately, they will often let this define them until something that matters more to them comes into their life. Attention must be called to students' potential and ability to learn so that they may succeed in school and in their lives. When students are not excited about school, they do not come. When they do not come, they may turn to violence and a life filled with fear, insecurity, and hopelessness. They let this define them because they think that they have nothing else. They let their socioeconomic status play a role in identifying them. School cannot define a person or even inspire a person if they do not attend.

Putting Words Into Action

So, in knowing all of this regarding the areas that I want to teach in (low income/inner city areas), how do I realistically and consistently provide an environment that enables students not only to learn, but gives them a DESIRE to learn? How do I unify a student body year after year that is culturally and mentally different each season? I believe by empowering, including, and encouraging individual confidence, students will feel respected and will be instilled with courage to try new things in the art classroom.

It is not only valuable that students know of a teacher's belief in them, but also it is important for the student to have an established belief in themselves. When exercising empowerment in a classroom, there is an ironic balance. Empowerment doesn't mean students rising up because there is no authority figure and they can do and say as they wish with no guidance at all. In order for the classroom to be a healthy atmosphere for the growth of empowerment, the teacher must exercise power over the classroom to enable a place of empowerment to be gained at a sensible, healthy, and guided rate. As an art teacher, I believe that it is my job to instruct and maintain authority in the classroom by creating and establishing an environment where students may grow and step into empowerment, knowing how and when to use it. Students can grow in confidence and ability because they are allowed to, but have a mentor/authority figure (the teacher] to fall back on and to look to for assistance. "...The creation of a learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves on delicate issues of gender, race, class, or sexuality, and where they can voice their personal experiences, is necessary for empowerment to unfold" (Toraiwa, 2009, p. 67).

There must be a level of genuine respect and acceptance in an art classroom in order for students to be express themselves and to grow in empowerment and discovery of who they are, the issues they care about, and their voice in their artwork. Within the unit I designed for the students at Clarke Middle School, I wanted to provide strategies that could empower them to want to have their voices heard, and I wanted the unit to be relevant to students. This is the only way it will sink in, matter to them in a personal way, and empower them to change their community as enlightened citizens. As the teacher, it is my initial role to instill all of these things into my teaching style and to connect with my students, allowing them to become empowered not only as art students but also as people.

Overview of Applied Project

The following chapters encompass various aspects of my applied project. Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature and research that I compiled regarding the potential effects that socioeconomic status has on students' performance in school. Chapter 3 consists of a narrative of sequential lesson plans that I created in relation to the findings in my literature review. These lessons linked together to form the unit on clay jewelry that I used during my time at Clarke Middle School as a way to further look into issues often caused by circumstances of a low income lifestyle, and to create an environment in the art classroom to allow students to be empowered and more confident.

Chapter 4 includes images of students' clay jewelry that were completed within the duration of my unit at Clarke Middle School, along with the reflective aspects of my applied project. While I was student teaching at Clarke Middle School, I kept a journal and wrote most of the days about various experiences, emotions I felt, the successes and criticisms of teaching sessions, and conversations with students. I have included some of these journal entries to provide further insight into my experience with student teaching and to also highlight specific instances that I felt lined up with the research I have conducted. Also included in Chapter 4 are two of the written essays that students were asked to complete reflecting on their personal experience with the clay jewelry unit.

My applied project concludes with the fifth chapter, which includes implementation of recent literature paired with observations I made and thoughts I formed while in the art classroom at Clarke Middle School. What I learned throughout this process, and how my applied project can be relevant and useful in other settings, and my final conclusion are also addressed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature



FIGURE 2. Gallery walk with students.

Where It All Started

In my first semester of graduate school, I took an introductory class to the subject of art education. I learned about the current status of education, relevant artists and writers, and read books that addressed how to incorporate theory, thought, and intentionality into the classroom. At the beginning of the semester, we watched a film called “Waiting For Superman” that captured the harsh realities that students deal with when living in the inner city schools. The film shows that while there are magnet schools and charter schools right around the block, students were basically forced to make due with their circumstances and attend a low-income school in their low-income neighborhood, even if they potentially wanted to learn at a higher level.

The magnet schools work on a lottery system which means that there are only an allotted number of spots each year for new students to fill, and in order to get one of these spots, the student’s number has to be drawn from the pile. Since the small number of spots are filled by chance, most of the students craving deeper learning have to turn around and attend the school

they came from, only to be surrounded by violence, bullying, anxiety, and premature responsibility; all side effects of living in the inner city.

“Waiting for Superman” started a stirring inside of me as I wondered what to do with these circumstances. If it was true that students may be stuck attending school in the inner city, and if low-income areas come along with harsh side effects, how do we address this? How can I, as a future teacher, discover how to use the art classroom as a place to not only realistically address the problems of low income areas and their effects on students learning, but to counteract the negativity and use my lesson plans as a way to engage the students, help them feel comfortable, and allow for them to be empowered by realizing who they are?

I felt that before I could look into this idea, I had to first find supportive literature that addressed the effects on students’ performance in school caused by life in the inner city. In the fall of 2011, I completed a review of literature exploring the negative educational effects of a low socioeconomic status. This literature review was a stepping-stone to my student teaching experience and why I handled it the way that I did. Without this literature review, I wouldn’t have known what to look for as I student taught in the art classroom at Clark Middle School.

In addition to the literature studied and reviewed in the fall of 2011, I read several books in the spring that furthered my awareness of what I was studying and hoping to write about. As I mentioned in my introduction (Chapter 1), this “new” literature that I looked at had more to do with empowerment, care, and rising above hard circumstances or negative connotations. The research in the fall was more centered on articles that addressed negative aspects that a low SES may or could have associated with it. While this literature showed me potential hardships and hurdles in education, the books I read this past spring led me to a place of knowing more about teaching any type of student to not only care for themselves, but also heighten their awareness of

caring for others. The focus became more about caring for and helping youth instead of just focusing on a specific socioeconomic status.

The Effects of Socioeconomic Status (SES) on Education: A Literature Review

I was interested in the realities that students deal with on a daily basis, mainly students from low income areas or the inner city, and how these realities affect their performance in school, whether it be behavioral differences or differences in performance or test scores. I needed to find literature that gave evidence for these “signs and symptoms” to provide for me a foundation for the second part of my applied project. If these effects really do occur in students, then how could the art classroom be used as an environment to address and assist these issues and potentially guide students through a positive process of self-discovery? But, in order for me to know what specific issues to look for as I observed and taught during my student teaching, I needed to formulate a literature review of evidence and support.

Inclusion/Exclusion

For this literature review, I wanted to focus on student issues that potentially could be counteracted within the art classroom, such as home environment, anxiety, teacher attention to students, and exposure to violence. Although most, maybe all, of the listed issues could and should be worked through alongside a professional counselor, I thought that these specific issues could be addressed in an appropriate way within the art classroom.

Theoretical Framework

I was surprised to find that there were few theorists throughout the selected literature that I read whose content related to one another. All of the articles seemed very independent and focused on just gathering the data and reporting the findings. Sources were repeated throughout the various articles, but in general there seemed to be little correlation of theory between the

articles. Focusing more on using the art classroom to improve a student's experience overall and to help them overcome issues that they may encounter because of where they live seems to be the kind of idea that presents a theoretical framework that I resonate with and am interested in. The literature I reviewed more quantitative than qualitative, where I am more interested in the story of the experience aspect that qualitative literature provides.

Personal Theoretical Framework

My interest within this applied project is to more accurately understand students so that I can figure out ways that an art classroom can address the realities of the potential circumstances of their lives. When students live in low-income areas, or the inner city, there are stresses that come alongside that (Lambert, Cooley, Campbell, Benoit and Stansbury, 2004). Since there are effects that may be caused by socioeconomic status and home life (Levine, Lachowicz, Oxman, and Tangeman, 1972) I think it is both appropriate and necessary to look for ways and practices that can help assist and address these issues. I believe that the art classroom is an ideal environment for this to occur.

Results

This review of literature was extremely informative. Even though some of the studies did not find a correlation between socioeconomic statuses and students' academic achievement, I found there to be enough evidence to demonstrate that socioeconomic status does play a role in individual student success in school. Waxman (2001) looked at schools that were labeled either E/E (efficient/effective) and schools that were labeled I/I (inefficient/ineffective). The portion of the findings from this study that I focused on was the survey of student perceptions of the classrooms. The E/E labeled schools had higher perceptions of academic self-concept, affiliation, teacher support, order/organization and student aspirations than the I/I labeled

schools. Also, I/I labeled schools were seen to only receive teacher attention forty percent of the time while the E/E labeled schools received teacher attention seventy percent of the time (Waxman et al., 2001). This concept is manageable in the art classroom because as the teacher, I can be sure to avoid performing like this. Students must feel accepted and encouraged to overcome, and they cannot begin to do this if they feel that they are not paid attention.

The correlational study between the home life of students attending an inner city private school and an inner city public school showed that students attending the private school had more supportive home environments and therefore did better academically (Levine et al., 1972), even when the families lived directly in the inner city. This supports the idea that the environment a student lives in can adversely affect how they perform in an academic setting. If they do not feel supported in the pursuit of education then they may not perform as well, maybe because it isn't expected of them to do so, which deeply affects their self-perception. The art classroom can be an environment that provides support and enables the student to be engaged educationally despite the lack of support in that student's home life. This study shows that socioeconomic status plays a role in students' success in education and in self-perception as well. The art classroom can serve as an environment that can help raise students' self-perceptions through the transformative process of art.

Education in the arts seems to be a factor that helps students perform better in school (Israel, 2009). It also helps students to stay in school that otherwise wouldn't have. Schools in New York City that dealt with student struggles to graduate had less exposure to music, dance, visual arts, theater and had fewer art classrooms, fewer art teachers, and cultural partnerships (Israel, 2009).

Socioeconomic status has been shown to effect students' level of anxiety. Lambert found there to be higher levels of anxiety specifically in inner city African American children.

Children living in urban conditions are exposed to associated chronic stress, which can develop into fears, and then anxiety. Eighty percent of children living in urban areas have been exposed to violence while 70% have been victims (Lambert et al., 2004).

Nel Noddings

Before a student can reach a level of overcoming stress, they have to feel accepted and cared about (Levine et al., 1972), which is a concept that Nel Noddings echoes in her writing. Noddings (2002) has focused on a philosophy of care and how it should be foundational in relation to people. Noddings wrote:

The key, central to care theory, is this: caring-about (or, perhaps a sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared-for, caring-about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs. Caring-about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations. (p.23)

The term "justice" is a focus in my research, and I resonate with Noddings' association of justice to care. A priority as an art teacher is to purposely care for your students, to try to provide them a unique experience through art, and to promote justice within the classroom. Noddings stated "The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter" (p.176). While the subject matter in art education is important, my first priority and motivation as a teacher is to interact with students and help them to develop in knowledge, experience, passion,

and awareness. This rings true regardless of where a student is from or where they live. The priority and goal remains the same, even though it may seem harder to accomplish.

Elliott Eisner

Elliott Eisner (2004) has emphasized that art should be thought of as an experiential aspect that provides a balanced approach to cognition. Eisner put it well:

Artistry, therefore, can serve as a regulative ideal for education, a vision that adumbrates what really matters in schools. To conceive of students as artists who do their art in science, in the arts, or the humanities, is, after all, both a daunting and a profound aspiration. It may be that by shifting the paradigm of education reform and teaching from one modeled after the clocklike character of the assembly line into one that is closer to the studio or innovative science laboratory might provide us with a vision that better suits the capacities and the futures of the students we teach. It is in this sense, I believe, that the field of education has much to learn from the arts about the practice of education. It is time to embrace a new model for improving our schools (Eisner, 2004).

I agree with Eisner in his opinion that art education has the power to improve our schools. There have been students at risk of dropping out that count the involvement in the arts as their reason for staying in school (Israel, 2009). This idea is central to my exploration in making the art classroom an empowering environment in the midst of possibly a dangerous place. My goal is that students stay in school and earn a degree partially because of the effects that art education has on them within their school.

John Dewey

I resonate with the ideas of John Dewey, who like Elliott Eisner, highlighted the concept of the experience. Dewey stated that the experience one can have depends on how the teacher

facilitates and carries out that certain experience. Past experience and interactions similar to the present ones affect how the student engages and responds (Dewey, 1938). This underscores the burden and effect that an unstable home life, anxiety, and premature responsibility could have on a student's performance in an educational setting. How they respond to and interact with an authority figure (the teacher), how they engage, and how "safe" they feel would be dependent and completely relevant to their "past experiences" or the life they live outside of school. Researching more on how to create a consistent experiential feel to the art classroom will be a part of this applied project.

Art for Life

In my first semester of graduate school, I took a class in which we read the book *Art for Life: Authentic Instruction in Art*, written by Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt (2005). I have never underlined and highlighted so much in a book before in my life. I know that this isn't a widely known theory or even a theory at all, but it was highly influential in my interest of study and was potentially the activator that made me want to focus on the idea of the art classroom being used to address issues of low socio-economic status. *Art For Life* does not necessarily address the effects of socioeconomic status, but it centers on the idea of art being used for all aspects of life. Art has the power to envelop and change educational and non-educational aspects or people's lives, and this change, I believe, can start within the walls of the art classroom.

While reading *Art for Life*, I discovered that the art classroom does not only have to be viewed as a place to paint, learn about elements and principles of design, and participate in critiques. The content in art permeates further than that. *Art for Life* illuminates the idea of using concepts in art the change a person's entire perspective of life. Basically, art can be used a

tool to relate to youth in general, not only show them how to paint a picture. Art can start conversations about who someone is, what he or she likes, and what he or she is scared of. Using art as a pathway to relate to students, learn who they really are, and develop deep relationships with them is my goal as a future art teacher.

Corwin and Boyle

Gregory Boyle's (2010) *Tattoos on the Heart* and Miles Corwin's (2000) *And Still We Rise* are two of the most influential books that I have read, not only for the sake of my applied project, but also in all areas of my life. By reading these books I was shown that by showing students compassion while also expecting excellence, students truly could be inspired and enabled to succeed. In *And Still We Rise*, Corwin partners with an inner city South-Central magnet school where he focuses on one gifted English class, and observes them from their first day of high school to graduation. Corwin watches as students work full time jobs, dodge bullets on the way to school, and complete beautiful essays. Toni Little, the English teacher, comes across as harsh as she pushes the students to read and write at college levels, knowing that this is the only way to provide them even a chance of attending college. Out of the twelve students that Corwin focused on, eleven of them attended college.

Tattoos on the Heart (2010) shows the effects of having compassion on people and truly listening to them and helping them. Boyle is the author and founder of Homeboy Ministries, which is located in the gang capital of the world in Los Angeles (2010). He provided gang members with an option of intervention, a way out of their dark and oppressive lifestyle. As Boyle helps people, he also learns from them. When a woman walks into his office as he is on the way to mass, he views her as an interruption (Boyle, 2010). He is disgusted as he realizes his impatience towards her, for she is the entire reason he started Homeboy Ministries, to provide

help and love for those who needed it. I found that these two books were inspiring to me because they are proof that change can happen when you are willing to pay attention to people, to be ready to learn from them and also help them. I do not view students as people who need me, but people who need care and direction, just as I do.

Final Statement

Students that may be affected negatively due to their SES cannot be expected to come to school open and ready to learn what is intended for them to learn according to the standards with all of this weight on their shoulders. Socioeconomic issues cannot be ignored in the classroom. It is unrealistic to expect students to function as if these stresses are not happening when they go home. That is why I think that the art classroom can be an environment in which problems in students' lives within the inner city and low-income areas can be addressed. If we can find a way to enable the students with their art teacher and amongst one another, then maybe they will do better in art as well as in school in general.

CHAPTER 3

Finding Meaning in Clay



FIGURE 3. Students painting their pendants.

The Beginnings of My Unit

Before I started my student teaching session at Clarke Middle School in January 2012, I had prepared to use the insight gained from my literature review to not only look for specific effects on students linked to a low socioeconomic status, but also to help me shape my unit. I wanted the end goal of my unit to be for students to walk away knowing more about art and knowing more about themselves.

Laura Lee Johnson, my supervising teacher, suggested I that use clay as the medium for my unit since the students had not worked with it yet that year. We brainstormed even further and came up with the idea of creating clay jewelry. Working with clay is difficult and intimidating, so we thought staying small would be an easier and more approachable task for the sixth and seventh graders.

The next step of developing my unit was to figure out how to incorporate meaning into every aspect of the art making process. While I knew that I wanted students to gain experience

and a better understanding of clay from the project, I also wanted this unit to be one that inspired growth. My hope from the beginning was that students would feel accepted for who they are, engage in reflective processes of creating clay jewelry, and be proud of their final pieces of clay jewelry.

In Mrs. Johnson's classroom, two concepts are emphasized: writing and craftsmanship. It is one thing to think through a response in your head, but it is an entirely different task to write a written response. Reflection requires a refined thought process that when attached to an experience or an art piece can illuminate so much. Mrs. Johnson often has her students end a project with a written reflection describing their experience throughout the process. Students are also directed to take notes and even respond to articles in a written form. Since many of the students at Clarke Middle School are low performing specifically in the art classroom, motivating them to write complete sentences can be difficult. However, the benefits of students being able to explain to any given person what he or she was thinking throughout the creative process are huge. I watched as other teachers reacted to the student work and reflections that were posted in the hall from Mrs. Johnson's classroom, as if they had thought the task of particular students writing successfully and at length was not possible.

Craftsmanship is a term frequently used in Mrs. Johnson's classroom. Most of the students know that to execute craftsmanship means that you have put care into something in an obvious way. There is a lot of discussion about craftsmanship in artwork and simple things that can show care for the final piece (two coats of paint, staying in the lines, outlining carefully in black Sharpie, etc.). Mrs. Johnson relates craftsmanship in art to craftsmanship in representing who you are. The middle school students are borderline obsessive with how they look, the brand they are wearing, and if their clothing looks expensive and color coordinated. Mrs. Johnson tells

them that they demonstrate craftsmanship everyday by the way they style their hair and match their jewelry with their shoes. The students care about how they present themselves, and this comparison makes it easier for them to understand how to instill care into presenting a work of art.

Written reflections and the concept of craftsmanship are two things I learned from Mrs. Johnson that I incorporated into my unit on clay jewelry. I wanted this unit to be an experience for the students where they learned how to write about the thoughts behind their art and to be able to execute craftsmanship by thinking through meaning behind every step and reworking and editing until the clay jewelry was something that they were proud of.

Clay Jewelry Unit

To paint, mold, tear and assemble without thought or direction is therapeutic; it's freeing. This is creating art for art's sake. But what about the art that isn't centered on how you were absent, clear minded and lost in the midst of it all, allowing the process to take you over and sweep you into a new land that you never dreamt of? What about the art that is actually founded on the concept of deeply thinking and intricately placing miniscule details that hold ideas so heavy that we can't even rest our eyes upon them without feeling a shift of emotion? This is the art that changes people. This is the art that reflects.

This unit is intended to enable students to not only engage with aspects of who they are, but to show them how to transfer pieces of themselves onto a piece of art. Throughout this unit, students will be diving into lessons that encourage connection with the deepest parts of who they are and it instructs them on how to use symbolism to reflect their personalities onto a piece of clay jewelry. Every step will be considered; every color, every shape, and every texture means

something. So while this project is about the process, the students aren't lost in it or overcome by it, they are actively engaged through every step of the way.

The students' clay jewelry will serve as a mirror, because it will reflect who they are and what their personality is like. They will also have the opportunity to instill meaning into another clay pendant that represents someone in their life that has made a difference, an impact. This unit is designed to get students to think; to get them to pay attention to what they are communicating about themselves and how they can do this through art. By the end of the unit, the students will not only know more about working with clay and paint, but will be more in touch with who they are and how to show others that through their art.

Digital Literacy

For the first lesson of the unit (see Appendix A), the students spent time in the computer lab using the Internet as a source of visual research. It was "Digital Literacy Week" and the entire staff was involved in including the use of digital media in the lesson plans. The students were asked to fill out a worksheet as they looked for images of shapes, colors, and textures that could represent aspects of their personality in their own clay pendant. The students drew sketches of these images and wrote about how the research they found in the computer lab provided them with ideas for the clay jewelry that they would be making.

Clay Techniques

The second lesson served as an introductory lesson to working with the medium of clay and specific techniques that can be used to communicate meaning (see Appendix B). At the beginning of the class period, the students are shown a word bank of adjectives and are asked to pick three that best describe who they are. This exercise is meant to help them identify qualities of themselves and to practice representing these qualities using clay techniques. The students are

introduced to relief, inscribing, openwork, and fluting. A PowerPoint (see Appendix B) is shown to illustrate the visual effects of these methods in clay, and to also provide the students with definitions and potential symbolic references that each method could project. Clay is passed out for this lesson and students are able to experiment with the clay and adjust to interacting with it if they have not before.

Personal Expression

The graded “Digital Literacy” Worksheets are passed back at the beginning of the next lesson in this unit as a review for the students to look back on ideas and sketches they came up with before they start to brainstorm about their first clay pendant. Students used the information on the clay techniques to assist them in filling out the “Self Expression” worksheet that describes colors, clay techniques, and shapes that will be implemented into the clay jewelry that represents who they are (see Appendix C). More experimentation with clay and with various textures found in the classroom is included in this lesson to provide exposure to multiple approaches students can have when working with clay. Additional workdays follow this lesson to allow students time to complete the “Self Expression” clay pendants (see Appendix D).

Honoring Someone Else

The students used their knowledge of clay techniques and the instilling of symbolism into art to begin working on the second clay pendant, a piece of clay jewelry honoring someone important in their lives. Writing was incorporated again by asking the students to fill out an additional worksheet describing their plans for this clay pendant (see Appendix E). If students finished, they could begin to work with clay again. Students were asked to reflect and think about their progress so far and if they were on track, or seemed to be falling behind. As the

students left the classroom, they were to turn in a “ticket out the door” assessing their personal progress and describing how they would grade their work ethic thus far.

Class Wide Rubric

The next portion of the unit included workdays for students to focus on completing their clay pendants, but also thinking about how to grade the clay pendants once they were completed. A class wide discussion was held, and each student was asked to write down two qualities that they would be looking for if they were grading the clay jewelry (See Appendix F). The students were able to share their thoughts and the ideas were compiled into a rubric that could be used to grade the final pendants. The concept of the meaning of color was introduced in this lesson. The students are able to begin painting the clay pieces, so meaning and emotion behind color is explained at length. The students are to select color schemes that purposefully represent character traits.

Gallery Walk

For the final lesson of this unit, the students participated in an activity that I called a “gallery walk”, where they look at each student’s work and are encouraged to provide feedback. The students place the clay pendants on a table covered in black paper. Each student has two sticky notes, which they write feedback on and leave beside different clay pendants (see Appendix G). After the completion of the gallery walk, students can touch up the clay pendants and make any final additions or changes that they like. The students write a final reflection that further describes the meaning behind both of the clay pendants that they created and their overall experience with this specific unit.

CHAPTER 4

THE WRITTEN EXPERIENCE

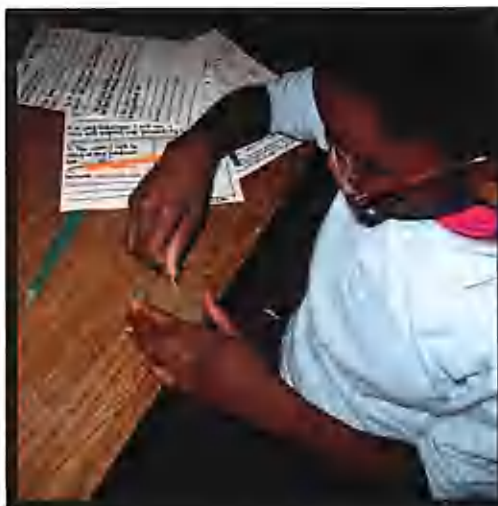


FIGURE 4. Student inscribing in to clay pendant.

Introduction

In this chapter I will reflect back and share specific observations and things learned during my time at Clarke Middle School. Through out my short eight weeks, I kept a journal of thoughts, observations, and reflections of various occurrences in the art classroom. I have included some of these excerpts as further insight into what my experience was like and how I effective my lessons were. I documented personal evaluations of teachings sessions, moments with students, and concepts to remember or pay attention to. I have changed the names of the students in my journal entries for their own privacy.

My Experience: Entries from My Journal

Reflection 1

January 10, 2012

The first eighth grade class I observed at Clarke Middle School was moved into a seating chart for resisting direction at the beginning of class. The seating chart took a while to get in place

since students were unwilling to get up and move. The rudeness is all a show. Raven would not move and was one of the girls that caused a scene when a seating chart was enforced. But when I helped her later one on one she was meek and sweet. She was a different person.

Reflection 2

“A Vicious Cycle”

Ricky is out of class frequently because he is sent to ISS, so he is behind on his work. This frustrates him. He acts out of this frustration, peer pressure, and bullying by his classmates [Ricky has a speech impediment] and his overreactions cause trouble in class. Most teachers resort to sending him to ISS. Ricky then gets mad at the teachers for sending him out of class and causing him to get behind. Once he gets back into a classroom, he is overwhelmed with his makeup work and channels this feeling towards the teacher. He acts out of his anger and gets sent to ISS, and the cycle continues. This reinforces his negative view of teachers and the lagging behind on his work. I wonder what would happen if a teacher stopped this cycle. Things to remember: love, be patient, know that these kids are hurting, seek to understand.

Reflection 3

I worked with Mark this morning. A car hit him when he was younger that left him with severe physical injuries. He walks very slow and doesn't have much control of his hands, and has a speech impediment where he talks extremely slow. He is funny, aware, and sweet spirited. All the students show him love, help him, and do not bully him. It is an amazing thing to watch students who have so many walls up and say so many hurtful things to one another be so sensitive to this boy. It is beautiful.

Reflection 4

January 30, 2012

Mrs. Johnson was sick today so I basically taught all day. I went okay. It was like a circus. I was always moving, always answering questions. *But I liked being the person that could fix their problems.* Eighth grade was hard because they are the oldest and generally the least intimidated by me, so I had to slam the door and it kind of got better. Seventh was good. Elijah showed me his necklace he made for his girlfriend for Valentine's Day. I love knowing about their lives. Sometimes it is hard for me to relate to students and push them beyond themselves. If they do not want to work and have already decided against it, it is hard to convince them otherwise. Monica was very resistant. Sixth grade was fun. Michelle freaked out when she saw the substitute in the room, but calmed down when she realized I would be teaching. "Tell her she needs to go. We don't need her. We have you."

Reflection 5February 6th, 2012

Today has been my favorite teaching session so far. I felt like I communicated better today and explained what we were doing more clearly. Sometimes I grow impatient and move forward too fast before all the students are ready. Mrs. Johnson is helping me to work on this by encouraging me that it is okay to move slower in order to all be on the same page. I do realize that it is wrong to expect students to think through and go deeper with concepts but not give them enough time to do so. Right now we are introducing methods of working with clay, so deeper meaning and expression will be implemented later. I am still trying to instill meaning now, even in the practice methods of clay. I try to get the students to think about the shapes that they are drawing

and what they represent [diamond: strong, circle: go with the flow]. The students start the class with choosing three words that describe who they are. They are given a word bank to choose words from to encourage them to not just write “pretty” or “cool”. Today I tried something new with the closer. Instead of just asking them to write the three methods of working with clay, I also asked them to circle which method they enjoyed the most. I will try to push deeper and deeper each time to enable them to make connections with themselves.

Reflection 6

This was my first time teaching the entire class. It went okay. It is hard to appeal to or relate to so many different types of students. Asia was difficult for me. How do I make things interesting for someone who walks in the classroom already uninterested? How do I build relationship through the giving and getting of respect in such a short time? Go deeper each time. Encourage more thoughts. Encourage more writing.

Reflection 7

This teaching session was great. The students listened well, and we moved through the lesson at a decent speed. I am still trying to get depth and meaning out of the students, but I think that will come later when they make their actual pendant. For the closer, I had them sketch ideas about what they may want to do for their self-expression pendant and explain why they chose the shape and how it describes them.

Reflection 8

Cassie: (circle with flowing lines)

“I am doing a circle because it represents me because I am peaceful and can usually go with anything.”

Katrina: (circle with lines shooting out)

“I am doing a circle because I am strong and it never stops. The lines embrace strength.”

Reflection 9

Dr. Henry observed me today. I taught the seventh grade the second part of the clay lesson in which they got to start working on their personal clay pendant. The students came in rowdy, and it took me several minutes to get their attention along with Mrs. Johnson’s help to settle them down. I review inscribing, relief, openwork, and fluting. Then I led the students in a demonstration of how to sketch details of their pendant. When they felt like they were done they reported to me. I would talk through the written description of their pendant and I would generally push the students and see if there were ways for them to go deeper. I felt anxious at the beginning of class because I couldn’t gain control. But I really enjoyed talking with the students one-on-one when we reviewed and revised their sketches. Some of the sketches were initially done in depth, some pushed through over time showing a connection to the art and the ability to look deeper into themselves. I was able to connect with individual students and encourage them, laugh with, and push them. Developing individual relationships helps with classroom management.

Reflection 10

Wow. The inconsistency is exhausting to me. Yesterday was good, but today was horrible. I was confused and had envisioned the lesson going in a different way. Danielle talked back to me and other students were completely unresponsive. Some students connect and are immediately ready to engage with me and also with their artwork. Some students respond well because of their personal connection with me. Some do well because they do well in every class. How do I connect with students that have already counted me out? It is still hard for me to see how to build relationships in such a short period of time.

Reflection 11

Today was fun. I enjoy the A day rotation. I feel like I connected with them more because those were the classes that I had when Mrs. Johnson was out sick. It's almost like we were to connect because all that we had that Friday was each other. I had to know their names and they had to know mine. All that they had was me. It went well. The students consistently resonate with hard times. They carve holes into their pendant to represent hard time in their lives. The color black is used frequently to show independence and strength through the hard times [When I walked around the classroom and asked students why they were using black, they told me to show their personal strength within the hard times of their lives. There was also a poster that showed various meanings of color for the students to get ideas from of what colors can communicate]. The students are eager to make their own pendants, eager to see what they look like after being fired in the kiln. They seem to be more comfortable with my presence and are seeking me out. They are very interested in representing all sorts of emotions and personality

traits. I am asked, "How do you show... happiness, sadness, loneliness, love?" Everything about this project revolves around meaning.

Reflection 12

How did I create connection today? Aaron and Michael who normally participate little to none in art class are paying attention to their pendants. They have their heads down and are consumed by their work. Their pendants look good. They have exhibited great craftsmanship. They are now ahead of other students. This is what I want: for students to find fullness in what they can do.

Reflection 13

February 20th, 2012

Today went decently well. I ran out of time for the closer, which always throws me off. Tamika and I usually connect but she was resistant today for some reason. The students are now making a pendant honoring someone else. I graded the self-expression worksheets and used those to show the students what to improve on for the second worksheet. The responses were significantly better. Some students are still resistant and do not want to even try to think or write. Some of the low performing students like Erik and Sean did well. I am still trying to relate to and make a personal connection with students through their art. It is hard when you are only here for eight weeks. I am hoping that since this is jewelry and they can wear it that they will connect more with it and care about putting it on display.

Reflection 14February 25th, 2012

Today we started painting pendants. Asia will not respond still. I had to move her and Amanda today. They will not stop talking. They portray such a defiant attitude.

Reflection 15

Kendrick. Troubled for what reason? Chooses negative attention. No support? Where do you go? Attention. You have to be seen.

Reflection 16February 27th, 2012

I am feeling more confident today. Mrs. Johnson said I am growing more comfortable. Today was fun. I liked teaching and interacting with the students. Joshua and Devon seem to have connected with me. They ask for my help and joke with me. Nicole and Maggie have as well. I enjoy helping and being someone that can give encouragement and answers. As I grow more comfortable with one on one relationships, I grow more comfortable teaching the whole class. If individual relationships are nurtured and established you then feel more comfortable in the whole environment. This is parallel to how the students feel. They are looking for someone to tell them it is safe to be who you are. I am looking for them to show me that they trust me.

Reflection 17

February 29th, 2012

This is the last day I will see the B day rotation. Someone is threatening Brittany. It has entirely changed her mood and work ethic. She is now testing me, pushing me, and resisting me. It is hard to know that it isn't about me. It isn't personal. This is something bigger.

Reflection 18

To form connection, you must teach a skill, and then show how to apply meaning to the skill. You must be involved. Relate to the students. Ask yourself "why" for all that you do. Be intentional with all you teach.

Reflection 19

The gallery walk portion of the unit was great to see. The students laid out their pendants and were interested in looking at everyone else's work. Knowing that other students were looking at their work made them more conscious of unfinished aspects of their own pendants. The students were able to comment on one another's work. I was surprised at how many students wanted to work more on their pendants after the gallery walk. They were allowed more time to add finishing touches before they turned everything in and completed the final reflection.

What I Learned From Myself

As I read through the reflections that I made while student teaching at Clarke Middle School, I sense the fear and intimidation I felt as I was trying to come across as an authoritative figure but also wanting to be accepted by the students. I deeply wanted them to *want* me to be there in the classroom. I was intently focused on looking for ways to help the students, watching

for need and rejoicing at tiny moments of connection. An important concept that I learned was executing patience in two aspects, patience with the student as a person and patience with the student as learner (different ways and speeds of learning). I now see how necessary it is to have patience with students in a way that allows them to be seen as an individual person. The children must be seen as more than a student. They have personalities filled with talent, virtues, and struggles that they are figuring out how to work through. If a student is having a bad day and portraying a negative attitude, it seemed easier to me to punish them for “messing with the vibe of the environment” and even ask them to leave the classroom. I see now that doing this could be adding to the negativity in their hearts (see Reflection 2). I feel that it is important to view each student as a person that is moving through the experiences of life just as I am. The “golden rule” may seem cliché, but I think that allowing yourself to be patient and to process how a certain student may feel in a moment will cause your actions to be founded on the principle of understanding, which I think will allow for a more genuine connection in the long run.

Being patient with the students as learners was a concept that I had to practice multiple times. I would get so nervous about teaching and ended up being so focused on sounding good and communicating well, that I ended up just talking to myself. I was teaching for me. Mrs. Johnson helped me to open my eyes and truly watch the classroom. It is okay if you slow down to wait on or help students. It is more important that the students are absorbing the information than to move through the lesson at a speed that seems comfortable to you. Students work at all different speeds, so it is important to watch the students work and to make sure that when you are moving ahead that the students are not stuck and you end up leaving them behind.

I spent a lot of time writing about and trying to decipher students actions. I noticed students acting a certain way in front of the classroom, and then completely changing their

demeanor when working individually with me (see Reflection 1). I repeatedly saw students show off, act tough, or act complacent in front of their friends and classmates. I would watch, as they seemed to put on a show of one who does not care about anything and will not be hurt by anyone. I would later have the opportunity to work with the students and help each one with their artwork. Most of the time, the student released the attitude and wanted to know how to do well with their project. I even saw students' faces light up when I could encourage them or show my amazement at what they had worked on. There was a certain student that was particularly resistant. She worked of her own accord, which sometimes meant not working at all. I would be lucky if she would respond to my voice when I asked her why she was sitting there not working. She preferred talking with friends, disturbing and bullying other classmates, and mostly, not being told what to do. Earlier this summer, I ran into her and her family at an ice cream shop in Athens, Georgia. I was immediately nervous about talking with her because I figured she had no interest in speaking to me and only saw me as an annoying older girl pretending to be a teacher. Before I could muster up enough courage to attempt at an awkward conversation with her, she walked up to me and said "hey" in a voice so quiet I was unsure if it had even happened. I was taken aback and almost brought to tears by the sweetness I felt in her spirit. We talked for a few minutes about school being out and her excitement for the summertime, and then we parted ways as we ate our ice cream separately with our family and friends. I realized then that most of the loud attitudes, tough personas, and apathetic responses are an act. It is all a game that children play with one another. They feel that they need to put on an exterior shell of strength to show that you will be able to hurt them, or reach them. Underneath this shell, I found, was a sweet girl that was doing the best she could to figure out her way through life.

I can still feel the ups and downs of the student teaching experience that I had at Clarke Middle School when I read back through my reflections. From the first day, I wanted to be approachable to the students and for them to want to confide in me, to laugh with me, and to learn from me. I wanted to learn from them as well, about who they are, what they like to do, and how they actually feel about art. My end goal for student teaching was for students to know that they can depend on me and to feel that I genuinely care for them. Reflection 4 perfectly portrays my reason for wanting to teach. "We don't need her. We have you."

Student Reflections

Student 1

My "self expression" pendant shows my connection with nature and the colors represent the elements. The techniques I used were inscribing and fluting. They represent how strong, fluent, and cool I can be in bad situations. The pendant honoring someone else shows the connection with spirits and souls. The colors represent yin and yang. The techniques I used were inscribing and relief. They represent how my friend can help souls get to the other side. My favorite part of the project was when we could make clay jewelry. It is important to put meaning into art because you can communicate with the person viewing the art about your feelings at the time of the work on the art and to tell your history or personality.



FIGURE 5. Student self-expression pendant.



FIGURE 6. Student pendant honoring someone else.

This seventh grade student had forms of special needs and had a paraprofessional escort him and assist him throughout most classes. He was unable to interact with other students in the class or work without direction. Every step of the way he would come find me and demand that I tell him exactly what to do. He had a low level of performance in regards to detail and craftsmanship, but I was blown away by his ability to articulate his intentions with his clay jewelry in writing. He did not use the worksheet that served as a help to students who struggled with writing. He composed all of this individually, since his paraprofessional was not in class that day. I was almost mystified by the connections he had been making all along throughout the unit.

Student 2

I showed personal meaning in my art by having my final pendant remind me of past experiences that bring me joy and a tranquil state of mind. My pendant looks like a moon with a star, which creates a calming resemblance. To start, I used relief as my first clay technique. I used relief because it shows how much of an impact I can make on my projects if I can really show effort. Secondly, I used inscribing to represent my smaller impacts that can still change a great deal of the outcome of something. I used more than two colors because I felt like I was more complex than that. The colors I used were light blue, dark blue, light green, and dark green. I used these four colors to show my amour for the ocean, all four of these colors remind me of wonderful times at the beach, so I felt like this was a good setting for my art.

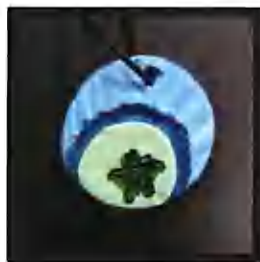


FIGURE 7: Student self-expression pendant.

Student Work



FIGURE 8. Student work 1.



FIGURE 9. Student work 2.



FIGURE 10. Student work 3.



FIGURE 11. Student work 4.



FIGURE 12. Student work 5.



FIGURE 13. Student work 6.



FIGURE 14. Student work 7.



FIGURE 15. Student work 8.



FIGURE 16. Student work 9.



FIGURE 17. Student work 10.



FIGURE 18. Student work 11.



FIGURE 19. Student work 12.

CHAPTER 5

KNOWLEDGE FOR THE FUTURE



FIGURE 20. Student painting fired pendant.

Conclusion

This applied project entails a great part of what I have learned throughout graduate school as well as my perspective and passion towards teaching. I had always been interested in “low income” settings and the people within them. Within all the hardships, there seemed to be more life, more soul and I gravitated towards that. For me, teaching students who live in rough neighborhoods or who reside in mansions, it is, in the end, less about what I can say to them, but more about what they can say to me. My priority in being a teacher is listening to my students and paying attention to who they are, what they say, and also what they don’t say. My unit on clay jewelry was designed to help students grow first comfortable and then confident in who they are as *people*, not just as artists.

It Is Not About Ignorance

While I may have a seemingly unrealistic vision of shaping students into strong citizens and building genuine relationships with them, there are certainly walls to break through. The

truth is there are tough aspects in many students' lives, whether you live in the inner city or not. Poverty is not only in the inner city. I am not saying to neglect the more affluent students who are probably lonely as well, but the person that I am is naturally inclined to people living in the inner city and finding a way to learn and grow together.

Throughout the process of research, I came across a book written by Miles Corwin who observed high school students who lived and attended high school in an inner city. He watched their patterns and daily lives for a year and documented observations and conversations held in the classroom. Corwin (2001) sheds light to a class wide discussion and said,

A girl with dyed blonde cornrows replies, 'I come from a single- parent home. My mama didn't tell me much. But I knew when something was right or wrong. I used to fight all the time. Nobody told me it was wrong. I knew it was wrong, but I did it anyway.' (p. 104)

The issue with students who have minimal guidance and maximum responsibility isn't ignorance, but resistance. There is unlimited potential with young adults. They sense what is right and wrong, they know what is good and bad. When they act out, it isn't out of blindness, but out of rebellion. When a young man or woman resists and rebels, the end goal is attention, and whether it is good or bad attention, at least someone is focused on them. Once a student has your attention, you have theirs as well. I attempted to actively use these moments to really listen and try to understand and embody what they may actually be feeling inside. Sometimes it failed, other times it seemed to work. I believe that the process of grace and patience paired with discipline and consistency is the way to gain students attention, respect, and trust.

Rebellion is Not An Interruption

In *Tattoos on the Heart*, Gregory Boyle (2010) writes about his experiences with Homeboy Ministries, an organization he started as an intervention program for gang members. On his way to conduct a church service, a female drug addict wanders into his office and begins to mumble on about the harsh realities of her abusive lifestyle. His impatience is growing as he realizes that he is late for mass as she starts crying and states that she is a “disgrace”. Boyle says, “Suddenly her shame meets mine. For when she walked through that door, I had mistaken her for an interruption” (Boyle, 2010, p. 42). When I student taught, I would get frustrated when students had problems or did not immediately understand what I was saying. I was enraged by their resistance to me and saw their rebellion as an obstacle to my teaching, when their walls of rebellion and resistance were the exact reason of why I wanted to teach in the first place.

Many of the students that I worked with at Clarke Middle School had protective walls up for various reasons and were generally defensive. If I saw them staring at me, I would look back at them and make eye contact. Students would usually jump back and say “WHAT??” seeming very offended that I returned their gaze. A sixth grade student once told me that he would not look at me because “eye contact makes you feel vulnerable”. Boyle records another experience in *Tattoos on the Heart* where he approaches a teenager to ask him how he is doing, and the boy aggressively responds with “I DIDN’T DID IT! I DIDN’T DID IT!” (Boyle, 2004, p.44) Like this story and the students that I interacted with at Clarke Middle School, it seems like children are so defensive that they cannot receive care. They have walls thrown up all around them that they cannot begin to recognize when someone is climbing over the wall to love them, not to hurt them. Though it takes time and consistency to build relationship with students like this, the walls are not an interruption; they are a part of the process.

Understand the Circumstances

There is only one bathroom for six girls. Sometimes she has to wait an hour before the shower is empty. Sometimes if she does manage an early shower, she has to wait again to get back in the bathroom so she can brush her teeth or fix her hair. Sometimes a girl at the foster home picks a fight with her. One night she had to sleep in the cramped backseat of her Volkswagen because she arrived home late, and the foster mother had locked the door. (Corwin, 2001, p. 101)

In *And Still We Rise*, Corwin discusses the realities that a girl attending the South Central based high school encounters and has to deal with on a daily basis. Upon her late arrival, her teacher's frustration is dissolved when the student explains why she is late, and proposes a genuine apology. The teacher can see through the lateness to the girl's motivation to get herself to class.

Like the teacher in this book, I think that it is my job to understand the circumstances that students may be dealing with. There are other things happening in their life that have nothing to do with school but affect them very deeply. I had a very positive relationship with one of the sixth grade students at Clarke Middle School. We had fun together, and she had such a sweet spirit. She responded well to my instruction and rarely caused problems in the classroom. One day she came in obviously very upset and was full of attitude. While I was teaching, I asked the students questions to allow for a class wide discussion and review. When I turned to ask the girl a question, she would not even look up at me, much less answer the question. Instead of taking it personally or punishing her for not paying attention, I kept moving with the lesson and helped the other students get started with their own work.

Later on in the class session, I asked the student to step out in the hall with me. I had seen Mrs. Johnson do this frequently as an attempt to try to understand the student as a person

and to be someone who cared for him or her and would listen. As I spoke with the girl, she informed me of some issues that she was dealing with amongst her friends. She was very hurt and felt betrayed and uncomfortable, since some of the people it involved were in the classroom. We talked through this for a few minutes and she seemed to recover quite well. She apologized for her attitude without me asking her to and continued on with her normal and focused work ethic.

One of the most important things I learned while student teaching at Clarke Middle School was not to take rebellion or attitude problems personally. These kids are surrounded by peer pressure, rejection, fear, and confusion. It would be naïve of me to assume that a student talking back to me during a lesson is *only* about me. Sure, it could be because they don't like me or the way that I communicate when teaching. But I found more times than not that students have walls up for reasons, and they are bigger than anything inside the school. It is so valuable to truly pay attention to your students and watch their habits, take note of their circumstances, and do your best to help them.

The hard part about being aware of your students' circumstances and empathizing with them is *limiting* the students to the circumstances. Just because they may struggle to find a way to get to school does not mean you should expect them not to come. In *The Shame of a Nation*, Jonathan Kozol (2005) tells a story of a student who got put into a sewing class, but wanted to be in an AP class. The teacher responded with "You're ghetto- so you sew!" (Kozol, 2005, p.215). The stereotypes and limitations put on students may be more damaging than the circumstances they live in. In order to allow students to grow, you must expect excellence. However, you cannot expect excellence without being committed to the long process of teaching it. One of the

most rewarding things about working with the students at Clarke Middle School was watching them come to an understanding of an aspect, and seeing on their faces that they were proud.

Relating to All

While most of my research centers on children living in the inner city or in low-income conditions, my lesson plans and style of teaching are meant to enable me to relate to all students in a genuine way. There were many students at Clarke Middle School who do not have a low socioeconomic status and who live in supportive, caring environments at home. My hope is to connect with these students and to teach them about how to express themselves through art is a priority just as caring for students with a low SES or an unsupportive home life is. Overall, I want to build relationships with youth in general. Boyle shares advice he received on his first day of teaching in *Tattoos on the Heart*. “Two things...One: know all their names by tomorrow. Two: It’s more important that they know *you* than that they know what you know” (Boyle, 2010, p.54). My desire is to be approachable and relatable to children and to meet students where they are and provide them with what they need individually and specifically. One student may need me to guide them through every step of a project, while another student may thrive working on their own for the majority of the time and coming to me with feedback when they need it. Regardless of where students may live or what support they receive at home, I want to be a source of support in the school that they attend.

In addition to my hope to relate to all types of students, I want my lesson plans and the environment of my classroom to encourage children from diverse backgrounds to relate to one another. In the clay jewelry unit I conducted while student teaching, several aspects of the project were reflecting into who you are, discovering ways to verbalize these aspects, and figuring out how to use images and symbols to show their personality in art. I think that if

students can be in touch with who they are, they can relate to other students in the classroom and identify with similarities in one another that may be unseen from the surface. The underlying theme in the structures of my lessons is for students to accept who they are, and in that acceptance, see the good qualities in other students and relate to them in a meaningful way.

Final Thoughts

My applied project paved the way for my thought processes and opinions to be where they are today. The literature opened my eyes to knowledge of the effects of a low-income lifestyle on students. This knowledge led me to intentionally form a unit that would address these issues and help deal with them by asking for deep reflection into who they are, what it looks like to look up to someone else, and how to project these emotions onto art and then further explain them in words. The motivation behind all of my research has been the concept of care. I came to graduate school to get a degree in teaching because I cared about students and I believed that I could make a difference. Nel Noddings says,

Today many young people not only fail to develop the capacity to care but also seem not to know what it means to be cared for. (Noddings, 2002, p.25)

My hope with my unit was for students to feel cared for by me, and to know that I was watching and paying attention to their needs.

In conclusion, this applied project has encompassed most of my recent research and the unit provided an outline for what I would base future units on. I don't know the full effects or benefits of my teaching style in the art classroom at Clarke Middle School because I was only there for eight weeks. I do think that over time with consistency and patience, you can transform rebellion and resistance into respect and trust. I also think that the concepts I am focusing on can be applied to many settings of life in general. Learning how to communicate in ways that relate

to various types of people and showing children how to look deeply into who they are seem like concepts that can translate into any classroom setting, and even beyond that. I look forward to researching further and looking for opportunities and settings in which to instill care into students.

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